

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

## Journalists: On the Subject of Courage

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“dirty war” in Argentina,  
is a relatively simple matter of  
overcoming fear.**

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that I would be killed, simply by accepting it as a fact.  
The knot in my stomach loosened considerably after that.  
There was, after all, no reason to fear being killed  
once that reality had been accepted.

**It *is* fear itself that makes one afraid.’**

ROBERT COX, ON TELLING THE STORY OF THE ‘DISAPPEARED’

“... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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# What We Share About Courage

By Bob Giles

In the working life of most American journalists, courage does not typically define what we do. Holding public officials and corporate leaders accountable, digging through files and records and challenging what political and business leaders say can be difficult. Resisting a court order to answer questions about sources can result in serious consequences. But in a society in which the rule of law and First Amendment press freedoms prevail, these activities do not require an unusual degree of courage.

There are dangerous assignments for U.S. journalists, to be sure—combat coverage and editorializing about civil rights in the South in times gone by come to mind. But the daily routines of our nation's newsrooms are not life threatening.

I did not appreciate the full meaning of this until soon after I arrived at Lippmann House in August 2000, when a phone call from Tim Golden, a New York Times reporter and 1996 Nieman Fellow, brought Ignacio Gómez, a young Colombian investigative reporter, into our lives. Nacho, as he is known, had been forced to flee Colombia—his country, where more than 30 journalists had been murdered—after his newspaper, *El Espectador*, published stories in which Colombian police and military were linked with violent right-wing paramilitaries. In one of the stories, a Colombian military colonel was said to have masterminded the 1997 massacre in Mapiripán, in which right-wing paramilitaries killed nearly 30 people for allegedly supporting left-wing guerrillas. Nacho received hundreds of death threats after that article was published.

Nacho joined the 2001 Nieman class and he, along with several other fellows, reminded us all of places where the practice of journalism is a courageous act.

In January 2003, we met Geoff Nyarota, the founder and editor of *The Daily News* in Zimbabwe. The government had orchestrated his firing as editor, then sent Zimbabwean police in a raid on his home, hoping to arrest him. Geoff and his family narrowly escaped across the border to South Africa.

After a brief exile there, and with help from the Committee to Protect Journalists, he found sanctuary as a member of that Nieman class.

This spring, David Sylvester, a 1986 Nieman Fellow, called to say that during an assignment in Guatemala he'd encountered three investigative reporters for the weekly newspaper, *elPeriodico*, who were under threat by the government as a consequence of their reporting. They were determined to continue their work but needed to learn more about investigative reporting. "What could the Nieman Foundation do to help them?" Sylvester asked me.

These journalists' commitment to their reporting inspired us to create a "mini" fellowship to bring them to Cambridge for a week in mid-May. They worked with The Boston Globe's Spotlight Team, attended a watchdog journalism conference presented by Investigative Reporters and Editors and The Associated Press Managing Editors NewsTrain program at Lippmann House, and met with Nieman Fellows. They talked about the difficulties of their journalistic work in Guatemala; one described how his home was ransacked by government police looking for records and of the death threats made to the paper's owner by agents who held him and his family hostage in their home.

In telling of their experiences, Gómez, Nyarota, our new friends from Guatemala, and journalists in many Nieman classes, recent and past, have taken other journalists to places deep inside themselves where an understanding of what courage feels and looks like emerges. What we've learned from them is how what's happened has toughened their resolve to do what journalists do even when danger is all around them. Often, too, what Nieman colleagues from abroad and the United States absorb from these exchanges is a greater appreciation of the inestimable value a free press holds. ■

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All of the words written for this issue of Nieman Reports revolve around an organizing thought: What does courage look like in the practice of journalism? This seemed to us a journey of reflection worth taking at a time when the lives of reporters are in peril on the frontlines of war; when dictatorial governments threaten and harass reporters and editors whose work demonstrates their independence; when invigorated prosecutorial efforts are underway to try to force reporters to reveal sources on stories about heretofore secret U.S. government policies and programs, and when public trust in the press is low and new media voices challenge journalists' roles as the primary conveyors of information

and watchdogs of powerful institutions.

Courage, as these journalists remind us, exposes itself in different guises. It can be found in the wisdom of understanding when danger finally has outweighed the risk. Or it can surface when threats to personal safety lurk but the lessons of training combine with inner strength to push fear aside and persevere. Courage can reside, too, in a journalist's isolation when editorial stands taken shake the foundation of friendship and sever long-held ties to one's community.

In this issue, glimpses of such journalistic courage are offered. ■ —Melissa Ludtke

# Courage as a Story Needing to Be Told

‘Unlike love, which may be an emotion only, courage must manifest itself in action.’

By Lance Morrow

Courage is one of the cardinal virtues (the others are justice, wisdom, temperance) and one of the human mysteries. It is hard to define, risky to predict. Courage is not bravery exactly. Not fearlessness precisely, for fearlessness may be amoral, even psychotic. Nor does the word fortitude quite cover it. Courage suggests a deeper moral or spiritual dimension—the strength of the heart (coeur). Courage may be entirely irrational—a matter of the good heart overriding the prudent mind and rising sometimes to an almost mystical level of human possibility. More profanely, it may be a strategy of careerism—courage is not always unselfish—and an aspect of professionalism, a habit of calculated risk.

John Kennedy considered courage to be the first, the indispensable virtue; with courage, he said, anything is possible; without it, nothing. Unlike love, which may be an emotion only, courage must manifest itself in action. Unless courage actually does something, and does it well, it is just bragging. Courage may not be indispensable to the practice of journalism, but it has become an increasingly pertinent and vivid theme in the dangerous, instantaneous world of the early 21st century. Seventy-three journalists have died covering the war in Iraq; elsewhere 171 journalists have died doing their work in the past six years.

The journalists’ reflections on courage collected here explore manifestations of courage not only in the face of physical dangers that threaten journalists but also in less violent environments—the political and corporate—that may endanger journalism itself.

One of the more interesting and anxious questions people ask themselves, especially when young, is whether they have courage. Journalists, as soldiers do, have gone to war to learn the answer. But the exoticism of battles in far-off places may have faded somewhat, and journalists reporting the world of terror, suicide bombings, and tribal genocides (Bosnia, Rwanda) are less likely to think of young Winston Churchill covering the battle of Omdurman as they are of young Daniel Pearl

in such a world is Paul Klebnikov, the 41-year-old editor of *Forbes* Russia who, on the night of July 9, 2004, was gunned down on a street in northeast Moscow as he walked from his office to the Metro station. An ambulance took him to the hospital, and he died on the way to the operating room when an elevator stalled between floors. Klebnikov was the 15th journalist killed in Russia since Vladimir Putin became president in 2000. The grandson of Russian émigrés who fled after the Bol-

shevik Revolution, he had the ingredients of an ideal journalist: fiercely focused energy, great intelligence, education (a PhD from the London School of Econom-

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**Courage may not be indispensable to the practice of journalism, but it has become an increasingly pertinent and vivid theme in the dangerous, instantaneous world of the early 21st century.**

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dying in a room in Pakistan. Churchill inhabited a world of chivalry, of “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,” (the Roman poet Horace’s line, known to every British schoolboy). Churchill said that nothing is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.

A journalist assigned to cover Iraq or Afghanistan or Chechnya or the drug wars of Colombia or northern Mexico finds the residual jauntiness and bravado draining off pretty quickly. The psychological effect is not exhilaration but a terrible corrosion of nerves and spirit. Merely to work becomes an act of courage, and the work stirs one of our deeper anxieties—the thought of dying a meaningless death or a death of which the rest of the world is unaware: merely to vanish as, say, thousands of the “disappeared” did in Argentina. Journalists may risk that possibility in order to live a meaningful life: to do valuable, useful, important work.

My model of journalistic courage

for the story (the emergence of the *new* Russia—part Wild West, part thugocracy). Klebnikov fearlessly made enemies of the crooked and powerful, publishing two books about Russian plutocrat/gangsters. Prosecutors said the hit was ordered by the head of the Chechen mafia, Khozh-Ahmed Nukhayev, the subject of Klebnikov’s second book, “Conversation With a Barbarian.”

The Tin Woodsman needed a heart; the Scarecrow, a brain, and the Lion wanted courage. “The Wizard of Oz” dramatized an ideal trinity of virtues—heart, brain, courage—that combine to make a perfect journalist. There is no such thing, of course, but Klebnikov approached this kind of ideal, and he died as a result of his commitment to this work he believed in, as George Polk did in an earlier generation, assassinated in Greece in 1948 because, it seems, his journalism brought him fatally close to the truth.

Klebnikov and Polk were martyred ideals. But journalists—whose mission is to dig for the truth, including sometimes the truth about themselves—must, more than most, beware of self-congratulation and of their own cant. Journalists often pride themselves on “speaking truth to power,” a cliché perhaps justified when courageous reporting is performed under dictatorial regimes that destroy printing presses, arrest reporters, torture them, or worse. But the “speaking truth to power” formula, when applied to journalism in the United States and Europe, should, as columnist Sheryl McCarthy suggests in her essay, involve journalists testing themselves to see if they have the courage to engage truthfully with peers within their own ideological community, or at least to question what have been sacrosanct assumptions or admit doubt that ingrained prejudices should be held beyond question.

To challenge friends or employers in their bristling core beliefs may be to declare oneself an enemy, to risk ostracism. At certain dinner parties, it requires suicidal recklessness to assert that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney have probably been right all along about Iraq; in the months after 9/11, of course, it would have been heterodox to say that Saddam Hussein was a paper tiger. At a conference of The New York Times editorial board these days, it would take courage for a member to argue against *Roe v. Wade*. Similar courage might be needed if a staff member at National Review spoke in favor of legalizing gay marriage, or if Rush Limbaugh’s producer praised Hillary Clinton.

Every editorial operation inevitably has a culture of shared prejudice, and every story conference is subtly suffused by an ideological atmosphere, especially in the polarizations of George W. Bush’s second term. Editors speak in a nuanced political shorthand: Lightly playing beneath the surface of conversation in every editorial conference will be a note of collective coercion,

a silencing whiff of mob psychology. The late Meg Greenfield, who for years directed The Washington Post’s editorial page, wrote a memoir in which she described the culture of Washington cocktail parties when she arrived there in the fifties. What passed for a cogent political analysis, she wrote, might sound like this: “Dulles! Dulles! Oh, God .... Dulles!” The realm of journalism is made up of warlord fiefs, each with its own tribalisms, and it takes courage to go against them, or to play the mugwump in a nest of zealots.

Courage raises as many questions as do other great abstractions, such as justice. In these pages, Reuters editor Barry Moody deprecates the egoism and heroics of old-style war coverage in favor of professional teamwork. Is courage necessary anymore? Or is it a dangerous irrelevance? Wall Street

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Journal reporter Farnaz Fassihi endured appalling dangers in Iraq but concludes, “... being there to tell the story was important and was worth the risks.” But the contrarian side of the mind asks: If so much about war and violence are so dreadfully and grimly the same, then why exactly is it important for journalists to risk their lives to witness and report, once again, what we’ve already seen and know? I answer my own question along these lines: Journalists risk their lives to tell us again and again about this violence so that we will always see it, never be dulled to it, never accept it.

Courage is always a story. But what does courage become when no witness is there to tell the story? Photojournalists showed the world a solitary man standing in front of the tank near Tiananmen Square. What if the man’s protest had taken place in the countryside of Shandong Province, with no cameras present, and tank treads

had casually ground him, unnoticed, into the rural mud? It is the tree-falling-in-the-forest question. In some ways, I suppose the greatest courage would be the loneliest—unnoticed, unrecorded, uncommented-upon. (In today’s strange metaphysics, there is the counterpossibility of beheadings enacted on video before a world audience.)

My mind snagged, for an instant, when I came upon editor Robert Cox’s statement that “I realized one day that I could deal with the idea that I would be killed, simply by accepting it as a fact .... It is fear itself that makes one afraid.” My reaction to that was a three-cushion shot. First, this is a stunning thing to say. Could it be so? Cox, after all, has the grim authority of his experience in Argentina during the time of the disappeared. But when Franklin Roosevelt told Americans in early 1933 that the “Only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” he was hardly telling them the truth. They had plenty to fear, starting with a ruined economy and (if they were prescient) the coming to power of Adolf Hitler. But finally, I decided that while

Roosevelt’s line was a stroke of brilliant psychology, Cox’s use of the same idea was working a deep vein of individual awareness and acceptance.

Most of us do not have the experience to judge what Cox says. Some tales of journalists’ courage amount (almost) to stories from beyond the grave. We must accept them. Cox is telling us his particular truth. Courage is inspiring and communicable, but just as it is always a story, it is also unique and intensely personal. ■

*Lance Morrow, a former essayist with Time magazine, is the author of “Evil: An Investigation,” “The Best Year of Their Lives: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon in 1948: Learning the Secrets of Power,” and “Second Drafts of History: Essays.” He is writing a biography of Henry Luce.*

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# When Death Seems Inevitable

‘There was a problem with acceptance of death; I was never in a mood to accept torture.’

By Robert Cox

Courage, I discovered while covering the “dirty war” in Argentina, is a relatively simple matter of overcoming fear. I realized one day that I could deal with the idea that I would be killed, simply by accepting it as a fact. The knot in my stomach loosened considerably after that. There was, after all, no reason to fear being killed once that reality had been accepted. It *is* fear itself that makes one afraid.

I thought this approach was a pretty good ruse because it allowed me to behave quite normally. So much so, that I have told friends who are fearful of flying that they will have no difficulty in getting on board the plane if they have already made up their mind that the plane will crash and they will die, though nobody to whom I have told my theory for overcoming fear of flying has told me that they have tried it, and it works. But by facing every day in Argentina expecting to be murdered, telling myself that this was exactly how it was going to be, worked for me.

I feel a striking identification with Iraqi journalists who are covering most of the war from outside well-fortified, protected zones after it has become too dangerous for the easily recognizable foreign correspondents to get out and about, even in Baghdad. Some Iraqi reporters explain that their ability to function is because they accept their inevitable date with death. Acceptance is the secret; it is a kind of grace.

Naturally, there was a bit more to it than that. I also decided I would do as much as I could to avoid being killed. That meant I needed to make plans to avoid being captured. At the same time, I told myself I must maintain absolute normalcy. I continued to take the “colectivo” (bus) to work, but tried to avoid being alone on the street. I remember

feeling pleased when I hit upon the idea of thwarting the death squad that I expected would one day come to get me by running into the elevator and stalling it between floors. The idea was silly, I suppose, but I thought that if I could hold off my pursuers for a while, I stood a better chance of putting off the inevitable.

There was a problem with acceptance of death; I was never in a mood to accept torture. I thought if I could put up such a fight, then my would-be captors would have to kill me. The same idea came to James Neilson, who was my deputy. He told me that he carried an old-fashioned cutthroat razor that he intended to use against his attackers and then on himself. We were in agreement; they would never take us alive.

## The Secret Police Arrive

Before I decided upon fatalism as an antidote to fear, I had a few lucky escapes, and these helped me to deal with the increasing realization that my time might be running out. When I was arrested on April 24, 1978, I guessed, rightly as it fortunately proved, that the heavily armed thugs from the secret police were not planning to “disappear” me when they came to take me away that afternoon as I was working in my office at the Buenos Aires Herald. Politely I asked the thugs where they planned to take me. They told me “Superintendencia de Seguridad,” which was an annex of police headquarters where the cells for political prisoners were.

I had been there three years earlier when the Herald was raided one night by police commandos. I insisted on accompanying the newspaper’s city editor, Andrew Graham-Yooll, who was taken in for questioning. It was on this

visit that I heard the screams of people being tortured. But Superintendencia de Seguridad was the site of a legal jail, not one of the regime’s clandestine prisons, and being imprisoned there turned out to be a useful experience.

On entering the underground cellblock I was greeted with the Argentine federal police’s welcome sign—a huge swastika covering an entire wall, with “Nazi-Nacionalism” written underneath it. Illuminating, too, was the time I spent in the infamous “tubos”—the vertical tubes that constituted the cells. The first one was lit only by the faint daylight from the air shaft far above. The second had a dim electric light. I was left alone long enough for my eyes to become accustomed to the gloom, and I was able to read the heart-wrenching inscriptions scratched by human nails on the walls. Judging by what these former prisoners wrote on the cell walls, they appeared to be very young and very religious. I saw only one militant proclamation of defiance. It was from a member of the self-styled Marxist-Leninist People’s Revolutionary Army. The other inscriptions were cries for help and were addressed to God or appeals to their mothers.

After an insider’s tour of four cells and two prisons, I ended up in a VIP cellblock ironically referred to as “el Hotel Sheraton.” This was where notable prisoners were lodged temporarily while the military government decided what to do with them. Relatives bribed the guards and were able to bring food. Jacobo Timerman, the leading Argentine journalist at the time, whose book, “Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number,” described what it was like to be in the belly of the beast, spent time there after his kidnapping and apparent disappearance aroused an international outcry. He read the



Members of Argentina's "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" in San Martín Square, opposite Argentina's foreign ministry. November 1977.  
*Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

same inscription on the wall of the communal shower: "Yankee, Get Me Out Of Here." Later he was plunged back into the netherworld of the Argentine military's clandestine prison system where he was brutally—and pointlessly—tortured.

A secret of survival was a sense of humor. It was a comfort that the horror was not unrelieved horror. The wackiness of the military dictatorship was to be savored, and at the Herald we did that, along with trying, as best we could, to report news that the Argentine press was not able to publish. I saw our role as upholding a tradition that the newspaper had established during the 1946-1955 dictatorship of Juan Domingo Peron when, as one Argentine newsweekly put it, "The Buenos Aires Herald published in English what the other newspapers cover up in Spanish."

As the editor of the Herald, I was fortunate that the newspaper's owners, The Evening Post Publishing Company, where I still work, were thousands of miles from Buenos Aires. That meant

that I could decide what to report. So I went out as a reporter, first encountering women searching for their husbands or children who had been taken away by the "fuerzas de seguridad." With my wife we checked out such rumors we'd heard that the city's crematorium was working overtime. We drove there at night and discovered that it was true, and we published stories about what we'd found. I went to many funerals, and we published reports of the missing.

My personal situation—and the newspaper's—was helped in that the military leaders did not know what to do with me. They claimed they were fighting for democracy against international communism in some sort of a third world war. Eventually, for us, the job of running this newspaper became a matter of saving lives. Never was it more clear to me how vital journalists can be, especially when other societal institutions have lost their ability to be a counterbalance to destructive forces within. Of course, assuming such an oppositional posture moved against

my well-honed instinct for taking an objective stance, but in the midst of a circumstance that was so surreal, abandoning this inclination didn't seem a loss at all.

In 1979, I experienced a near kidnapping in which I was saved by the doorman of our apartment building who was a Jehovah's Witness who had suffered under the military and knew that the Herald had spoken up for his religious peers. I decided to leave Buenos Aires when what I had not expected—what I had not factored into calculations about my own death—happened. Word reached me that the military would go after my wife and children. On December 18, 1979, my family and I left Argentina. ■

*Robert Cox, a 1981 Nieman Fellow, is assistant editor of editorial and opinion pages at The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina. He was editor of the Buenos Aires Herald from 1968 until 1979.*

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# Climbing to Freedom Word By Word

‘... our ethical and political convictions gave us strength to resist and keep advancing.’

By Jose A. Martinez-Soler

I will never know if I am a courageous or cowardly journalist, especially while being tortured or facing a mock firing squad execution of a paramilitary commando. In those horrific circumstances, which happened to me on March 2, 1976, my body was battered black and blue, my face burned and bloody, and a gun was pointed at my forehead two hand-lengths away. A kidnapper was slowly counting; he would shoot me on three if I did not reveal the identity of my sources. Those guarding me from behind stepped aside, as their footsteps rustled the leaves.

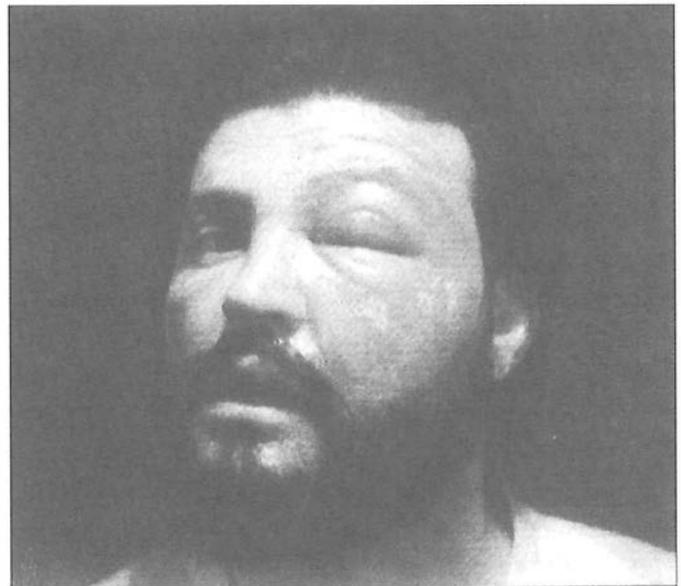
I do not know if I would have had the courage to keep secret the names of my sources, but I did not betray my sources because I never knew their real names. My confidential military sources knew what they were doing and wisely protected their identity with pseudonyms, while the investigative clues they gave me were easily confirmed in the Official Bulletin of the Army and involved the systematic transfer, i.e. the purging, of democratically minded high-ranking generals to isolated rural areas. Would I have betrayed them had I known their identity? Perhaps, but I will never know.

Ever since that traumatic day, I've never considered myself a courageous journalist. I understand those who "tell all" under torture, and I understand fear. On that day, four or five hooded men armed with machine guns and pistols blocked my car as I was leaving my home in the outskirts of Madrid. They burned my face with a spray, handcuffed me, and drove me to an isolated spot near the top of Sierra Gua-

darrama, northwest of Madrid. There they interrogated me for nine or 10 hours using the traditional methods of torture to obtain the desired information. I was "obliged" to sign an official declaration that was to be used against two top ranking generals of the Civil Guard whom they considered anti-Francoists.<sup>1</sup>

Just before nightfall, the kidnappers abandoned me in the mountains but threatened to kill me and my wife, Ana Westley, also a journalist, if I ever denounced what had happened. I was terrified. After leaving the hospital, where Ana and I felt unsafe, we decided that I could at least try to annul my "official" declaration. I went to a night court and said that I had been beaten and was forced to sign something official, "three carbon copies," but that I suffered from traumatic amnesia and could not remember details. After I did that, we received death threats over the telephone while journalists demonstrated (illegally) in the streets.

For convalescence, we went into hiding for several weeks. Upon our return



Left for dead: Martinez Soler, victim of Franco, not Pinoche

## Spain taunted on its terror

Coverage of Jose Antonio Martinez-Soler's kidnapping and beating appeared in the Sunday Times (of London).

home there were more death threats. We were given police protection, and I applied to the Nieman Foundation. Ever since the kidnapping, I have been afraid to confirm publicly, in writing, the details—just in case. In an exercise of catharsis, as I prepared this article, for the first time I have written a full account of the experience, which is now on my personal blog, along with some pictures taken of me in the hospital.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> General Francisco Franco led a military coup against the democratically elected government of Spain's Second Republic in 1936. Franco ruled Spain until his death in November 1975.

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.20minutos.es/martinezsoler/post/2006/04/13/mi-secuestro-hace-30-anos>

## Journalism in a Dictatorship

In writing now about this experience, I want to reflect about what happens to the practice of journalism when one's words are subjected to official censorship or when freedom of expression is threatened. One thing I have learned is when readers live in a dictatorship, they know that the supreme source of information is the dictator. Therefore, they distrust the official press and believe very little of what journalists, who are bound by censorship and hobbled by judicial threats, publish. Yet they're able to decipher facts and opinions written between the lines, so as journalists we work hard to establish a privileged thread of communication through complicit winks, subtleties, humor and layered meanings that are largely invisible to censors.

Franco's dictatorship controlled the large tectonic plates of Spanish society, but journalists managed to communicate through the fissures among these plates. Using euphemisms, parables and humor, we found ways to zigzag around official control and transmit messages at the least possible risk. The censors, for example, forbid the use of the word "strike." Franco's police sequestered the weekly newsmagazine, *Cambio 16*, for publishing information about a strike, so the next week I wrote a story about the same strike but called it a "technical worker stoppage." Nothing happened. And just before the death of Franco, one of his ministers, who had been a press censor, solemnly declared: "From now on, we will call a strike a strike." His statement made headlines. And when democracy came to Spain, the dictionary was restored to journalists.

During Franco's time, we also learned to print the riskiest information in centerfolds that could be easily removed. That way, if the censor banned the article, we could quickly reprint it with the required changes or replace it with another innocuous feature, thereby avoiding a costly sequestering of the entire publication. Another technique involved substituting objectionable paragraphs with photos.

But the dictatorship also learned to

read between the lines. Dozens of times I was indicted for so-called press or opinion "crimes." With my article about the Civil Guard, in addition to being kidnapped I was indicted by the department of military justice on charges of sedition, despite being a civilian. I did not have a court martial, thanks to an opportune general amnesty for press crimes decreed by King Juan Carlos later that year (1976), just as I accepted my Nieman Fellowship.

These are ways that freedom of expression emerged word by word under the long dictatorship of General Franco. Every banned word and image we managed to defeat was another step on our upward climb toward freedom and democracy. For us, there could be no retreat, and our ethical and political convictions gave us strength to resist and keep advancing. In doing this, we were not displaying courage but professional integrity. For this, we would take some risks, but not too many. Actually, we were fairly prudent, and we became artists at simulation and mockery. We were experts at subtly slipping in a word here, another there. We moved about in a dictatorship—and still we move about in our democracy—like a pendulum that looks for equilibrium between passion for the truth and the instinct for survival, between costs and usefulness.

I do not believe that journalists deserve any more merit than doctors, lawyers, teachers, firemen, or engineers who also try to do their job well. The difference is that we work with material that is highly inflammable or explosive—words that give form to ideas and news events. Like others, we only want to do our job well, and we know risks come with the job. But for us, the compensation—when we manage to publish what we intended to publish—is immediate, intense and priceless. I cannot calculate how many times we put ourselves at risk in order to publish a dangerous bit of news. But was it out of personal courage or just for the satisfaction of doing a story well? Or was it for personal vanity?

On February 23, 1981, an attempted military coup suddenly made it painfully apparent that Spain's young de-

mocracy was shockingly fragile. Tanks rolled into Spanish TV and radio stations and all broadcasts, except military marching music, were suspended. The tanks rumbled on toward newspapers. Members of Parliament, and the entire cabinet of ministers, were held hostage for 18 hours by machine-gun toting Civil Guards. When a Spanish TV cameraman managed to leave his camera running, he filmed the coup, and this was later aired throughout the world.

The Parliament members were served sandwiches wrapped in the front page of a special edition of *El País*, the leading paper, with the headline, "El País with the Constitution: The coup in the process of failure." Receiving those words gave hope to the hostages and government ministers who had no news from the outside; they also disconcerted the coup perpetrators. Had the coup triumphed, it is not hard to imagine the fate of those journalists, photographers and cameramen.

Four days after the coup failed, I wrote a story in *El País* that told how the coup attempt was experienced in Brunete, a nearby town outside of Madrid that had been an important battlefield during the civil war. With the coup thwarted, I never considered any special risks involved with doing this story, even though democracy was obviously still fragile under constant military surveillance by the die-hard followers of Franco. Was I daring? Courageous? Irresponsible? What I was doing is only what journalists do in telling an interesting story of tension and inflamed passions in a small town.

That afternoon, the mayor of Brunete visited me and said, "I come unarmed," which I took to be a threat. The mayor warned me that he could not "contain" some villagers who were planning to burn our house down that night because they were angered by my story titled, "It's not an argument, woman, it's another uprising!" After hearing this, we called the national police and my wife, my three-year-old son, and I took refuge that night in the house of Reuters bureau chief, François Raitberger. Nothing happened to our house, and the town's soccer team

won a game against a neighboring town, so the passions dissipated. That, and perhaps a call to order from the national police.

## Journalism in a Democracy

Twenty years after my kidnapping, in fully democratic Spain, I was the television interviewer of candidates for prime minister on state controlled TVE during the electoral campaign of March 1996. I had been called in from New York, where I was bureau chief, to do the interviews. I asked the Popular Party challenger what I thought was an easy, even friendly, question about what he would do with the extreme right wing members of his party, who were popularly termed the “Jurassic Park.” The candidate, Jose Maria Aznar, bristled, fudged a reply, and went on to win the election.

Early in his term as prime minister, Aznar’s government fired me from my job as the New York bureau chief of Spanish Television.<sup>3</sup> So much for freedom of expression in a new democracy! What journalist would not reconsider his or her questions on the next interview? For me, it became very difficult to find work again in Spain despite support I received worldwide from journalists. The New York Times



A demonstration in support of Martinez-Soler.

published an editorial titled, “A Chill in Spain,” and the Financial Times ran an opinion piece titled, “Spanish Practices,” which ended with these words:

“Martinez-Soler, 49, may now well be kicking himself for a lapse in tact during the Aznar interview when he referred to the Popular Party’s old guard as ‘Jurassic Park.’ A former fellow of Harvard University’s prestigious Nieman journalists’ programme, he had also clashed with the previous Socialist administration. Before that, shortly after General Franco’s death, as a young magazine editor, he was

kidnapped, tortured and subjected to mock execution, after writing an article about the paramilitary Civil Guard. This time he has merely been sacked from his correspondent’s job. That’s progress for you.” ■

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<sup>3</sup> More information about this in Spanish can be found on Jose Martinez-Soler’s personal blog at <http://blogs.20minutos.es/martinezsoler/post/2006/03/04/aznar-vuelve-primera-pagina-decimo-aniversario-su>

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# Murder, Threats, Fires and Intimidation in Gambia

An anonymous letter sent to a prominent journalist ‘promised to teach a lesson to journalists who persisted in their negative reporting.’

By Alagi Yorro Jallow

Gambia was once known as the “smiling coast,” a place full of sunshine, welcoming with generosity of spirit. Home to the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, it was a bastion of democracy in a continent beset by military coups

and despots. It boasted a long tradition of press freedom and celebrated in June 1994 with a journalism training workshop in which I took part that was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy.

A month later everything changed. A group of junior army officers over-

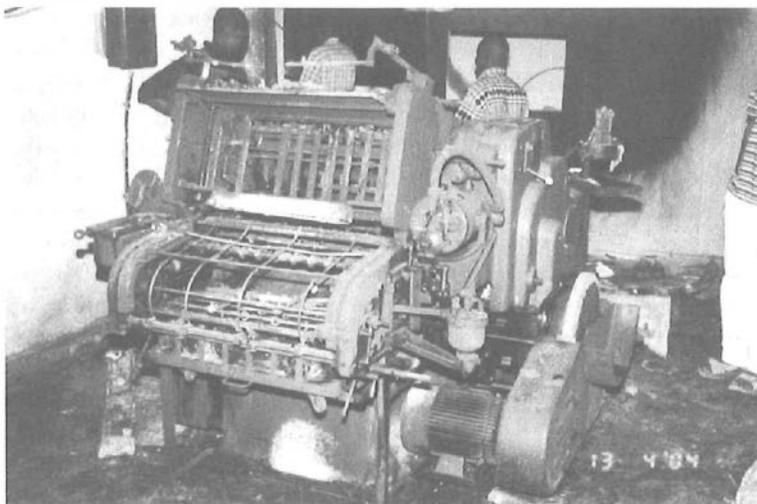
threw the 29-year long government of Sir Dawda K. Jawara. Soldiers installed one of their own, Yahya Jammeh. He promised to rid the country of corruption and run a decent, open government. It wasn’t long before his promise of transparency became a

transparent lie.

Attacks on news organizations started almost immediately. There were raids on the independent press, and journalists were subjected to harassment and deportation. Because the country had few private media outlets, a change of ownership—and subsequently a change in its approach to news reporting—at the Daily Observer, one of the nation's bigger papers, narrowed the outlets for independent newsgathering still further. Against this backdrop, I started a biweekly called The Independent, which hit newsstands in July 1999 and soon became the fastest growing newspaper in readership and popularity. With its Monday and Friday editions, circulation grew to 10,000, with an estimated readership of more than 30,000.

Less than a month after The Independent was launched, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) raided its offices, and many journalists were arrested and detained. Authorities claimed the paper had not fulfilled all of its obligations to be allowed to operate. This came despite the paper's managing editor having been given permission by officials in the government. For two weeks, the paper ceased publication. Once it began again harassment and intimidation continued with unrestrained regularity. I was arrested and detained as the authorities attempted to investigate the paper's source of funding. Even female typesetters were bundled to the NIA headquarters in Banjul.

In July 2000, I was arrested and detained by the NIA after I published an article about a hunger strike at the Central Prison. Asked to reveal my sources, I refused. Eventually I was released on bail. In August,



The Independent's printing press was burned in 2004 as part of a campaign to stop the biweekly newspaper from being published.

however, I was arrested again, and this time placed in solitary confinement where I was subjected to physical and mental harassment and psychological torture. Officers forced me to strip naked, and I was kept in the empty cell. Mosquitoes were everywhere, and the floor was damp with urine. Many of the prisoners in this jail were sick, and I contracted pneumonia and malaria. During my confinement, I was held incommunicado and was not allowed to talk to anyone, including my family or a lawyer.

A month later I was arrested again when The Independent published a story with news that the vice president had remarried. The government was

embarrassed by the story because after a spouse dies it is customary for a person to wait one year before remarrying. Hardly a week passed when the newspaper and staff members were not harassed by NIA authorities or by people identified with the ruling regime.

In October 2003, The Independent's premises were set on fire for the first time, and the newsroom was partly destroyed. A security guard was attacked and hit with an iron bar. I began receiving death threats. By January 2004, the situation had deteriorated even more, when I received a letter signed by a group called the "Green Boys" threatening to kill me and destroy my newspaper because of our reporting. Soon the printing press was burned. One source told the National Assembly that two officers of the Gambian National Guard were among those who attacked The Independent, yet no investigation of this crime has been undertaken.

After The Independent's press was burned, the Daily Observer printed the paper for us. Soon, however, I was notified that the arrangement had been terminated; no reason was given. For two months, The Independent did not publish, but its press run was resumed by a skeleton staff working in Gambia and a few determined reporters and editors elsewhere. Its circulation dropped almost 50 percent, and it was printed on a smaller sheet by press operators who prefer to remain anonymous. Other Gambian printing and publishing outlets have refused to print the newspaper on contract because, I believe, they have either been threatened not to print The Independent or



A front page story about Gambia's president in a 2003 issue.

fear that they or their presses could be attacked as well.

## Threats and Murder

When it began, The Independent had 25 staffers and freelancers. About four and a half years later (after I'd received a personal death threat in the letter signed by the "Green Boys" along with a threat to destroy The Independent), many of the newspaper's senior reporters and support staff have left the paper. Many have also left the country, as some of its leading journalists have sought political asylum in Europe and the United States.

In June 2004, officers arrested and detained me for three hours without charge, allegedly for publishing a story that two persons were killed in a Gambia-Senegal border clash following a violent football match between the two countries. Attacks on journalists continued. In August 2004, Demba A. Jawo, then-president of the Gambia Press Union, received an anonymous threat at his house that referred to critical reporting by Jawo and other members of the independent press against President Jammeh and his government. The letter promised to teach "one of your journalists a very good lesson." Three days later, unidentified persons set on fire the house of BBC stringer Ebrima Sillah, but he escaped unharmed. (In July, the BBC in London had received a letter that accused Sillah of biased reporting against Jammeh and threatened an attack on him.)

President Jammeh's hostility towards journalists is what pushed members of Parliament to find ways to muzzle the press. In 1999, the Gambian Parliament prepared a bill to create a National Media Commission with quasijudicial powers including registering private media houses and journalists, to revoking licenses, issuing arrest warrants for journalists, and fining or even sentencing journalists to imprisonment. This commission

would also be able to force journalists to reveal their sources. Strict penalties would be assessed if journalists did not comply with the new law, including imprisonment and heavy fines.

In 2002, this bill was enacted into law. Deyda Hydera, editor of The Point newspaper, and I knew that this law was inimical to a free press. We partnered with the Gambia Press Union to challenge it and hired a lawyer to contest the legislation. The lawsuit reached the Supreme Court in 2003 and challenged the constitutionality of the National Media Commission Act of 2002. Two hearings were held before the state counsel—the lawyer for the government—declared that



The Independent's newsroom was partly destroyed when it was set on fire in 2003, another attempt to stop its publication.

the government was going to repeal this act. We did not want to withdraw our case because even if this law was repealed, we wanted a final declaration by the court that it was unconstitutional. This lawsuit is pending before the Supreme Court, which sits every six months. We are awaiting a final decision while we look for sources of funding for our lawyer to continue to pursue the case.

The government then proposed an equally draconian set of laws—the Newspaper Act and the Criminal Code Amendment Act. The Newspaper Amendment Act forces private newspapers and journalists to execute bonds in the order of 500,000 dalasi,

or approximately \$20,000, an amount that is four times the previous bond requirement and so excessive that it will have the effect of shutting down the private newspapers. The act also requires newspapers to register with the Registrar General. The Criminal Code Amendment Act expands the definition of libel and provides for harsh imprisonment terms of not less than three years in jail. This legislation was passed by the Gambian National Assembly in December 2004.

Hydara and I prepared to launch another lawsuit against these laws. By doing this we became targets of the state; we were seen as using the courts to justify our actions in exposing the

dictatorial tendencies of the government. Soon the state developed a different tactic of silencing us, by destroying our properties and by murder. In December 2004, an unidentified assailant shot and killed my friend, Deyda. Two members of his staff also were injured. The government has not investigated his death.

Hydara's assassination is evidence of the extent to which the Gambian government is prepared to go in

order to silence its opponents. Actions taken against the independent press demonstrate the intractable view of President Jammeh that all journalists are criminal illiterates who would be best "buried six feet deep." It reveals, too, the impunity of those who murder people who dare to oppose the government. Such actions expose the rotten heart of the government in my beautiful country. If a man like Deyda Hydera can be murdered for the proper execution of his profession, then no one can sleep peacefully. Nobody will be spared.

Is it possible to act courageously as a journalist in Gambia today? Perhaps, though it is surely true that our experi-

ences—with the murder of our brave friend, the torching of our printing press, the imprisonment and torture and threats that reach us and do not abate—have taught us that there are limits to what we, and our family members, can endure, especially when we are not able to do the work we know is ours to do. As intimidation builds, stress finds less and less relief as every possible effort to push on and report and publish is exhausted. When time and time again those efforts are foiled by government intervention, when our personal safety is threatened, the courage to seek another way and do so from another place can become the force of change.

Self-censorship by the press in Gambia is a real possibility. Hydera's death sparked a climate of fear that could lead to fewer voices critical of government. Families of journalists and independent media workers, even

families of those who operate printing presses, now pressure their loved ones to refrain from overt criticism of the regime and to look for other employment. Even slight association with the independent media is dangerous.

But no amount of intimidation, death threats or attacks can cover me into silence or compromise my editorial policy. Though I now live in exile in the United States, my interest in learning and publishing the truth remains paramount. As a Gambian journalist, I am prepared for the dangers and risks, the trials and tribulations, and the aches and stresses of running a wholly independent newspaper such as *The Independent*. Yet even this spring, in March, plainclothes police officers stormed *The Independent's* offices and arrested every member of my staff, as guards sealed off the newspaper. No reason was given for it being closed. Most of the staff was

released after brief questioning, but two of my paper's senior editors were held in custody for more than three weeks incommunicado and without any charges filed against them, which is against the laws of Gambia and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of our reporters was then arrested and remains in custody, with no contact allowed. *The Independent* remains closed today because of the government's actions against it. ■

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## Violence in Liberia Extends to Journalists

‘The government warned that any journalist or news organization that violated the ban would be considered and treated as “rebels.”’

By Isaac Bantu

Journalists report out of a sense of responsibility to inform and to educate the public. But it takes courage for journalists to take on reporting assignments that they can anticipate will have dangerous consequences, including the possibility of imprisonment, torture and even death. Conditions of press freedom differ in countries with repressive regimes, but all journalists who report under these circumstances share a sense of what it means to try to do this work while being always mindful of what might happen.

Even though journalists in the West African nation of Liberia now enjoy a high level of freedom in this fledgling democracy, reporting under past dictatorial regimes required courage given the violent manner in which

government officials reacted to reports that they considered unfavorable. The recent history of the Liberian press is replete with stories of abuse against journalists who were harassed, intimidated, jailed and murdered, while news organizations were banned or vandalized. These actions were sanctioned by government officials, directly or indirectly.

The worst example of this treatment occurred in November 1985, when my Liberian colleague Charles Gbenyon, a young enterprising television journalist, was arrested and butchered to death upon orders of then military ruler Samuel Kanyon Doe, reportedly for his antigovernment reporting. Gbenyon was arrested in the wake of a failed military coup to depose Doe, which turned very violent and bloody as

Doe's regime unleashed a brutal wave of reprisal against real and perceived enemies. It was an act of courage that Gbenyon chose to go out into the field and report unfolding developments amid the mass chaos that was dangerously life threatening.

Several journalists were arrested in the wake of that failed coup, and I was among them. I was arrested primarily for reports I'd filed to the British Broadcasting Corporation's African Service in London about the chaotic state of affairs in Liberia when Doe stole the presidential elections of October 15, 1985. Like other members of the press in Liberia, I was mindful that if what I reported did not please the regime, then I faced danger. Nevertheless, my reporting reflected the reality on the ground, not necessarily what the re-



The National Patriotic Force of Liberia (NPFL)—the rebel forces in that country's brutal civil war—left their mark on news organization buildings they destroyed. *Photo by Gregory Steinn.*

gime wanted the Liberian public and the world to be told. For these reports, I was arrested at my home—brutalized and stripped to my underpants—and then my house was set ablaze and reduced to ashes. I was incarcerated for nearly four months. It was not the last time I would be arrested and treated abusively.

### Challenging Authority

During these difficult times, even at the peril of their lives, journalists had to decide whether to impose self-censorship or rely on the courage required to publish and report “sensitive” stories and suffer the consequences. In May 1991, Gabriel Williams, the managing editor of the independent daily *The Inquirer*, along with the paper's news editor and a reporter, were detained by commanders of the West African peacekeeping force commonly called Ecomog. These journalists were accused of smearing the image of the peacekeeping force and undermining security because of a report in *The Inquirer* linking a top brass of Ecomog to gunrunning and smuggling of raw materials.

Deployed in Liberia to bring an end to that country's senseless and bloody

civil war, the peacekeeping force, dominated by regional power Nigeria, provided full security in and around the Liberian capital of Monrovia against rebel forces then led by Charles Taylor. Nigerian forces were stationed at the air and seaports, where some of them were found to be involved in illegal activities with the customs service, including facilitating the importation of drugs into Liberia. Nigerian warships under Ecomog patrolled Liberia's territorial waters to prevent the smuggling of arms and raw materials into and from the country, but there were allegations that some smuggling was taking place.

The *Inquirer* was tipped off about a ship that was involved in the smuggling of arms and raw materials with the collusion of some top brass of the peacekeeping force. After *The Inquirer* concluded an investigation establishing that some of the peacekeepers were involved in illegal activities, Williams convened some editorial meetings to discuss whether to publish the report. Part of the discussion revolved around consideration of the potential risk involved in publishing the story.

Some editorial staff members urged that the report not be published, citing security reasons and potentially

dangerous repercussions. Others favored publishing the report as a way of drawing public attention to such illegal activities, irrespective of consequences. Williams sided with those supporting publication of the report, though he was aware that doing so could endanger him and the news organization.

Hours after the paper appeared on the newsstands, Ecomog soldiers arrived in the paper's offices to pick up Williams. Two staff members decided to accompany him to the headquarters of the peacekeeping force. After many hours of interrogation and days of harassment, in which the top brass of Ecomog unsuccessfully tried to force him to retract the report, peacekeeper officials finally acknowledged their problems. Faced with a serious international embarrassment, they were forced to institute some operational reforms in their Liberian operations.

### Government Bans Reporting

During 1989, in the early months of the senseless and bloody civil war, as rebel forces marched from the interior to Monrovia to depose Samuel Doe's regime, independent journalists and news organizations were among those targeted by the regime as enemies, real or perceived. As security conditions deteriorated, government officials announced a ban on all press coverage relating to the war. The regime said that reporting of the war was creating more fear, tension and chaos among the public. The government warned that any journalist or news organization that violated the ban would be considered and treated as “rebels.” Such threats had resulted in the past with journalists being jailed, tortured and killed, and newsrooms were vandalized.

Immediately after the government ban was announced, journalists of the independent media convened a meeting under the auspices of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL). This national journalist organization, of which I once served as president, was formed to build stronger solidarity in the face of danger. At this meeting, the union announced that its members would not

abide by the government's directive; they continued to report on the war at great risk to themselves and their news organizations and did so out of conviction and courage to keep the public informed.

A few weeks before this meeting took place, the offices of the independent Daily Observer, one of the leading daily newspapers in West Africa, had been set ablaze in retribution for an article the paper published relating to the war. The regime deemed it to be unfavorable coverage. The fire destroyed the Observer's photo processing room and library, which had one of the best collections of resource materials in

the country.

As rebels attacked the city and Monrovia descended into chaos, independent news outlets were vandalized or burned to the ground. Most independent journalists also went into hiding during this period; many were forced into exile simply to stay alive.

The history of the Liberian press has long been characterized by the struggle to keep the public adequately informed in the face of repression by regimes determined to keep the people subservient to their will as they operate with impunity. Principally through acts of courage independent journalists and news organizations refused to al-

low this to happen during all of those years of repression. ■

*Isaac Bantu, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is president and director of Mano River Media Forum/MARIFO, a Boston-based news network that monitors issues concerning press freedom, human rights abuse, political, social and economic issues in the Mano River Basin countries that include Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, which are bordered by the Mano River.*

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## Dictatorship and Democracy Require Different Kinds of Courage

'Officials begged the magazine not to pursue the story and then they enticed us with rewards. All efforts to derail our reporting failed.'

By Sunday Dare

**I**t was May 1999, and Nigeria's military ruler General Abdulsalami Abubakar had finally brought to conclusion a protracted political transition journey that lasted almost 14 years. The country was still awash in the euphoria of the exit of the disgraced military leader from power and, after conducting a successful election, newly elected President Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in. The Nigerian media were also enjoying a honeymoon period; as military power was ending, a new dawn of journalistic freedom beckoned with the arrival of civil democracy.

Or so it seemed. But if Nigerian journalists, along with many citizens, believed that with the diminished power of the military such qualities as selflessness, determination and commitment to a just democratic cause were no longer essential, they were in for a rude shock.

With Nigeria's new democracy emerged a new breed of strange bedfellows—corrupt politicians, military

apologists, and political desperadoes who were willing to do anything to remain in power. Early on, members of the news media were caught flat-footed when they failed to investigate information and rumors that emerged. The story would involve the third most powerful person in the government—the speaker of the House of Representatives, who had falsified his age, academic credentials, and other qualifications that he'd submitted to contest and enter elections. For nearly two months, journalists made feeble efforts to investigate these allegations. And during this time, repeated denials by the speaker and his aides were reported.

Why didn't the press act more aggressively to report this story? Perhaps many of them feared that in doing so they might harm the country's newfound democracy. Whatever the motivation, this lack of journalistic courage—the news media's failure to dig deep and find out the truth of

these allegations—resulted in many journalists and news organizations simply ignoring the story.

### Reporting in a Fledgling Democracy

People in Nigeria thought this story about the speaker was dead and that his hold on government power would continue. But The News magazine's editorial team met and decided this was a story that needed to be thoroughly investigated if Nigeria's new democracy was to survive. The magazine commenced investigations in Nigeria and overseas as it set out to uncover the facts about the speaker's qualifications.

As general editor of The News, I played a lead role in the investigations. After looking into his childhood and his family and academic background, conducting Internet searches and doing interviews, The News assembled compelling documentary and anecdotal evidence that the speaker was a fraud.

## Terror Unleashed

*Sunday Dare has written a book, "Voices From the Trenches: The Story of Guerrilla Journalism Under Military Rule in Nigeria." He is now looking for a publisher. In an excerpt, he tells about an incident that happened with The News, an independent magazine in Nigeria. Dare describes the context of this excerpt: "This Gestapo-like raid on The News and Tempo magazines occurred sometime in April 1998 when military dictatorship under the regime of General Sani Abacha was in its most brutal stage. The journalists at The News, Tempo and Tell publications were singled out for attacks, harassment, arrest, unlawful detention, and elimination. This was the height of the Abacha paranoia and journalists were game."*

Seconds after the Peugeot station wagon and a pickup truck came to a suicidal screeching halt, six security agents

armed with .45mm rifles flew out. They made straight for the entrance of the newspaper building. With their heavy boots they kicked on the iron doors to crudely announce their presence. In less than five minutes they made a forceful entrance, but not before one of the magazine's security discretely dispatched a coded message around using the intercom telephone system buried in one of the desk drawers of the security post table. "Move, move or I will shoot," barked one of the government security men as he ordered the two rattled and visibly frightened guards to lead them to the offices of the editors.

Inside the newsroom of The News magazine in Ikeja, central Lagos, Nigeria, reporters, editors and media workers responded simultaneously to the urgent warning passed around. Whenever such sudden movements occurred, especially a security guard rushing into the newsroom breathless, it

meant only one thing—the state security agents were around to arrest anyone in sight. As everyone raced towards the secret back exit, many fell face down and were not spared by the others who simply stepped on them to make the final desperate flight to safety. The escape route was narrow and only a few made it. A few editors made it first, helped by the stronger hands, not out of any plan, but out of an understanding that they are the ones the security agents wanted badly. Yet many reporters and administrative staff stood frozen either shocked or unable to comprehend the swift seconds of unfolding dramatic assault and escape from the clutches of the enemy.

As the scramble to safety progressed, the company guards employed delay tactics to provide more time for escape by taking the security goons first to the storage basement and then to other unoccupied offices within the build-

While our investigation was going on, The News staff were threatened by government officials but also cajoled by them, too. Officials begged the magazine not to pursue the story, and then they enticed us with rewards. All efforts to derail our reporting failed. Three aides of the speaker, who were the first ones to threaten me with demands that the story be dropped, visited me in my house in the early morning hours. I refused, despite their threats. Then they offered me the carrot of two briefcases apparently filled with cash. I told them their best option was to have the speaker defend himself in an interview or a court of law. I also advised them that any attempt to buy off the magazine would fail. They left my house furious.

The magazine hit the streets with the cover line "The Face of a Liar." The impact of our publication resonated throughout Nigeria. The issues sold out fast, so we did three print runs; in all, almost a half million copies were

sold, which made this the highest selling edition in the history of magazine publication in Nigeria. Less than two weeks after The News published its story, and every effort to intimidate us to retract the story or face court action failed, a tearful speaker, Salisu Buhari, wept in front of national television as he announced his resignation and confessed to falsifying his age and academic qualifications.

In making sure this story was thoroughly reported and told, The News staff displayed an adherence to the rigors of investigative journalism and a commitment to finding the truth, all the while showing the necessary fortitude to resist attempts at bribery. Each reporter and editor who worked on this story faced great personal risk. What they did in reporting this story is courage in the practice of journalism.

The publication of this story about a powerful political leader disgraced out of office served two important defining

purposes. For journalists, it offered a valuable lesson in courage, one that they can never afford to forget. For those in power, what The News did was to serve notice that no safe haven existed for anyone who had climbed or would climb to power based on misrepresentation and corruption. The News went on to do several similar reports in which solid reporting led to exposure of politicians, primarily governors and senators, who were elected using false credentials.

### Reporting Under a Military Dictator

On June 12, 1993, a national election was stopped abruptly by the military government's orders. Only The News published the results, which were annulled by the government and nearly sent Nigeria on the path of war. Soon after, General Abacha, who went on to rule Nigeria with brutal power for five

ing. Sensing that time was deliberately being wasted, the leader in a fit of rage hit one of the guards on the shoulder with the butt of his gun. "You will be arrested and tortured if the editors escape." The guard let out a scream of anguish and crumbled to the floor. Notwithstanding, kicks from the jackboots of the other four security men rained on him to teach him a lesson.

Without any more tricks, the second guard, unwilling to go through the same treatment given to his partner, led them into the nearly empty newsroom and the deserted offices of the editors.

Instantly, they knew they had been fooled. Mission unaccomplished, they furiously overturned the tables, ransacked the drawers for documents, and used the butt of their rifles to smash the desktops. In 30 minutes, the hitherto organized newsroom was made

to resemble an abandoned abode of a lunatic. Then they turned on the guard, Bello, and gave him some thorough thrashing after which they bundled him unto the floor of the jeep and madly sped way. They also whisked away personnel

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### **'You will be arrested and tortured if the editors escape.'**

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staff, including the librarian. Just about anyone they saw around.

Six hours after the attack, darkness fell. Ten agents of the dreaded State Security Service moved in to keep a covert surveillance over the premises, in full alert to arrest anyone attempting to access the office. The siege declared on The News was at its highest stage.

Darker nights lay ahead for The News

and other media houses. The team rallied, as it had always done after every attack, to strategize. The group met in a safe house somewhere in central Lagos where a mobile newsroom was quickly set up within hours. There was work to do and no time to waste. Idowu Obasa, a trained accountant and much-talented general manager of the group, rallied the team. There was no let up. Work continued on the next edition of the magazine. Instructions were issued, and everyone basically knew what to do after several years of similar experiences. It was back to the trenches, and the newsroom was a no-go area. Obasa was a towering figure who combined his accounting duties with an unmatched editorial skill. He was on call as always and ensured that the publications—The News and Tempo—stayed on the streets during the darkest days of the siege against the media. ■

years, was installed in power. During Abacha's rule, The News reported on an alleged coup plot against his regime. After conducting a thorough investigation, our magazine scooped the special investigation panel report that cleared all the soldiers and civilians who had been accused of plotting to overthrow the government. Our reporting exposed Abacha's allegation of a coup attempt as untrue, a phantom charge orchestrated by his military government to eliminate opponents and deal with the critical media.

Because of The News' unfavorable reporting and interviews, successive military governments tried to cripple our magazine's operations. For example, General Babangida's regime went after The News fewer than six months after it began publishing in 1993. Repeated attacks on its offices, including the destruction and confiscation of thousands of copies of editions of the magazine and illegal arrests and

detention of editors and reporters by government security agents, failed to stop the journalism that we practiced at The News. When those attempts failed, the military outlawed the publication as well as consumption of any publication related to The News. The editors of The News—Bayo Onanuga, Dapo Olorunyomi, Babafemi Ojudu, Kunle Ajibade, and Seye Kehinde—were declared on national television to be wanted by the military government. During this time, I was still a national correspondent.

Rather than stop reporting, the editors decided to take The News underground and thus defy the military's order. Soon we were doing "guerrilla journalism" for a new magazine we called Tempo, which in reality was simply a new name and face for The News. Even though government officials figured out what was happening, and knew the same journalists were behind this new publication, we were undeterred. The harassment and at-

tacks and manhunts continued, yet in the face of so many risks our magazine was produced each week.

We worked under very difficult conditions. For months at a time, the senior editorial team and the production crew were holed-up in a one-room apartment on Lagos Island. Reporters dropped their stories at different locations. Meetings were held in odd places like churches, stadiums, bars and restaurants, car parks and in taxicabs. We became constantly mobile journalists who worked incognito; we had no fixed address and were isolated from friends and family. Magazine production was broken down into different stages and printing done in several printing houses, while circulation was done under the cover of the night.

We continued to write critical stories that government officials did not want published, such as when we exposed that it was the agenda of the military to continue in power indefinitely. Many

of my colleagues, as well as journalists at Tell magazine, a sister weekly that endured a fate similar to ours, were arrested, tortured and jailed. My closest colleague at The News, Bagauda Kaltho, was abducted in 1995 and tortured to death; his body has never been found.

In the face of these travails and risk to our lives, we continued our work as journalists. The bravery and determination I witnessed during this time—to not desist from reporting when the risks of doing so are so enormous—is courage epitomized. The fearlessness I saw among these reporters as they dared to be different when other journalists were either quitting their jobs or supporting through their silence and inaction an illegal government is courage in action.

This determination of Nigeria's progressive media, alongside the actions of many brave people in civil society, eventually paid off when the military no longer could justify their stay in power, lost all legitimacy, and decided to allow an election to take place.

Institutional and personal courage often go together as reporters work to uphold journalistic ethics in their reporting and news organizations refuse to succumb to pressures to censor what is reported. The result of this partnership is courage, just as it takes courage to venture into enemy territory so an important story will be told. To display fearlessness in pursuit of a story, even when danger lurks clearly in the shadows, is courage. It is also about having the tenacity to keep going after an important story even when the odds seemed stacked against success. Courage is about seeing each new day as an opportunity—another challenge—to rely on the ethics of good journalism.

Without courage, the vitally important stories we, in Nigeria, have read, heard and seen in the news media through recent decades would not have been possible. And this continues to be true, even more so now. Though Nigeria has an elected government in place, the need for journalistic courage remains in high demand, such as during the dubious attempt to amend

the country's Constitution to allow the incumbent president a third term of four years. Those who oppose this amendment, along with those who report on these critics, are under scrutiny and risk arrest.

In this current climate, it is essential that journalists remain vigilant and bold as they keep a watchful eye for any unconstitutional acts of Nigeria's powerful central government. If Nigerian journalists were under any illusion that with the exit of the military the courage needed to report on political developments would be lessened, they were mistaken. The events during the past five years demonstrate clearly that the level of courage needed to report events truthfully and not be compromised in doing the work of journalism remains very high. ■

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## A War Reporter Tries to Understand What Courage Is

'Thinking about courage becomes a reflection on humanity.'

By Alexis Sinduhije

Emmanuel Ndamwumvaneza covers wars for our radio news station. One day, with no other reporter on hand, Emmanuel was sent to cover a health story. We'd heard that in Burundi's hospital emergency rooms, when sick people can't pay their bills up front they are not cared for. At Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), an independent radio station, we wanted to put a constant watch on this situation to see if this was true and, we hoped, to end this unfair rule.

When Emmanuel Ndamu, as we call him, a giant, strong and courageous war reporter, saw a woman who was giving birth refused medical attention because she had no money to pay, instead of his usual loud shouting, he

was speechless. This woman's situation became the focus of his reporting as no one paid attention to her screaming cries for help. He had some money with him, but not enough to finance the care she needed. In time, a man did walk by who had money meant to feed his family, but he gave it to the hospital to save the life of this woman and her baby. Emmanuel's own feelings were a mix of anger and happiness. "I was so happy to see that in the country there are people with heart, people who can give without thinking of themselves, just help," he said.

In his radio story, Emmanuel spoke of humanity, a word he'd never used in his stories about the violence of war.

In his work, Emmanuel was always

searching for answers as to how a person shows courage. He'd ask this question of all of us in the newsroom, as he wondered where someone gets the courage to stand for what is right when everything is wrong. I'm afraid all he received from us were vague responses. All of us knew that Emmanuel was very courageous, risking his life all the time to report on war. But few of us ever paused to think about what courage is really about. I never imagined that one day I'd be asked to sit in front of my computer and write about courage, so when I did this my thoughts turned to Emmanuel.

Thinking about courage becomes a reflection on humanity. In my country, Burundi, beyond the savage rules in

our hospitals, injustice and cruelty is imposed by the government against innocent civilians. Most of time people are killed for what they are: Hutu kills Tutsi and Tutsi kills Hutu. Humanity is disregarded as children, old people, and women are killed. In this poorest of nations, whatever growth in wealth there is gets taken by powerful political actors who put their energy into stealing the limited riches of the country.

RPA's values are rooted in the belief that providing Burundi's people with independently verified information will break the circle of violence, promote accountable leadership, and improve the lives of the people. In the midst of our nation's ethnic war, between Hutu and Tutsi, we recruited Hutu and Tutsi combatants to work together in gathering news. It was a very difficult and dangerous thing to attempt since it meant taking fighters from the war. In doing so, we were alienating ourselves from the Hutu rebel group and the Tutsi-led army. We had to convince these soldiers to take this job instead of fighting each other.

Teaching them journalistic skills was one challenge; the hard part for us was making them believe they could work together and fight for people's rights by using a microphone instead of an AK-47. We met Emmanuel in this way, and he and the others quickly became good reporters. In time, through their reporting, they denounced human rights abuse, exposed corruption, investigated state crimes, and covered the war. To do this they risked their lives, but because of what they did they discovered and brought to light many crimes against humanity in Burundi. Because of their stories, many people were able to get back the lands that had been taken by more powerful forces. By breaking the codes of the powerful interests on both sides of the conflict, these young and dynamic reporters became the voice of the voiceless. Recently, they were also brave enough to remind the newly elected president that the people in Burundi are citizens, not his subjects, after the president had sent police to stop a press conference led by a member of

Parliament who was denouncing the misuse of public funds.

Courage comes from anger, the anger to refuse injustice. In every society, when the powerful use lies to rule unfairly, there are people with courage who rise in opposition. The man who paid for the woman to receive help at the hospital was driven by anger at the selfish. One day as Emmanuel was investigating a large massacre, I asked him if he was feeling afraid of the killers. "I am so angry about this," he told me, "that I think there is no place for fear in me. These people who have been slain could be me. I have to go after the truth no matter what." ■

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## When Corporate Managers Nudge News Decisions

The clash of cultures 'affects editors' and reporters' ability to investigate stories and break new ones.'

By Philippa Green

In the South African winter of 2005, a young broadcast reporter, Mandla Zembe, went to cover a rally for the anniversary of the Soweto uprisings in the eastern seaboard province of KwaZulu-Natal. Two days earlier, South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki had dismissed his deputy, Jacob Zuma, after he'd been named in a trial of a businessman as having been involved in a corrupt relationship. Zuma, who is from this province, was a popular guerrilla leader in the underground army that fought the apartheid regime and has voluble support in the region.

As the provincial premier spoke, the crowd expressed itself forcefully, pelt-

ing him with bottles and other objects. Premier S'bu Ndebele, like all premiers, is appointed by the president, and the crowd now regarded him as Mbeki's man. They also scrawled Zuma's name on cars parked at the stadium. Under this barrage, the premier had to be rushed off the stage with his bodyguards protecting him.

Zembe filed hourly reports for the radio news bulletins on all the stations of the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). He reported the story, too, for the SABC's evening TV bulletins.

At the time, I headed SABC's radio news service. I spoke to Zembe, one of

our best reporters, several times that day as the story developed. About an hour before the main TV news bulletin, a senior SABC manager in Johannesburg called me. He demanded that I "discipline" Zembe for his inaccurate reporting. Premier Ndebele had complained after the radio reports aired, claiming that he had neither been pelted with objects nor driven from the stage. My manager told me he'd promised the premier time on our current affairs show on the Zulu-language station Ukhozi to set the record straight, as well as prime time on TV.

Zembe was badly shaken. As he'd driven out of the stadium through the

hostile crowds, his car had been pelted. “You should see my car. It has ‘Zuma’ written all over it,” he said. When he had arrived in the newsroom, he’d found armed bodyguards there—and assumed they were the premiers’. They didn’t talk to him, but their presence made him uneasy. That evening someone called to threaten him with death. Even harder for him, he told me, was that he didn’t know what to do because his story was accurate. I advised him to stay with the truth.

The premier used the airtime afforded him to deny that he had been forced to cut short his speech or leave the stadium earlier than planned. The next day newspapers around the country carried pictures of Ndebele leaving the stadium under a metal table that was carried by his bodyguards to shield him from the welter of objects thrown from the stands.

KwaZulu-Natal has always been a hard place for SABC journalists to work. Some three years earlier I’d rushed down to Durban, the province’s capital city, to wrest from the police a tape they had confiscated from a radio reporter. The tape contained an interview with a man who had held his wife hostage over a grievance related to his tow-truck business and alleged police corruption. The police had shot him dead minutes after the interview although he seemed to pose no threat to his wife. Then they had taken our reporter’s tape.

I bristled with righteous anger, but this soon fizzled in the face of truth. The reporter, a veteran from the apartheid era at the SABC, had given the police the tape without protest. This was what he’d done in the past, he said, and had seen no reason why he should not do so now. In sharp contrast to the young, postapartheid Zembe, who had clung to the truth of his story against authority, this reporter was steeped in the art of acquiescence.

The irony: Zembe has since left the SABC; the old reporter is still there.

## Clash of Cultures

This profound clash of cultures does not manifest itself only between old and

new journalists; there is also a sharp divide between editors and reporters from both eras who are committed to journalism and a cadre of managers, also from both eras, who see the public broadcaster’s role quite differently. This clash is especially keenly felt in the provinces, where the SABC has a vast network of journalists and radio stations that, if robust, can seriously irk local rulers. The instinct of managers in the head office of Johannesburg, and their proxies in the provinces, is often to soothe the feelings of the local big fish.

In one sense this is because the SABC has had a hard time shedding its shoddy past. During the apartheid regime it was, in the words of Allister Sparks, “an explicit and unashamed propaganda machine.” Under the new democratic government it has emerged with a much more representative board of directors, as well as legal protection from political interference. Its editorial charter pledges fairness and public service journalism, with a news service that produces news in all 11 official languages plus, in the case of radio news, two other San languages.

Yet the SABC is an organization that continues to make almost as much news as it produces. One reason is this clash between old and new. Another is its contradictory structure and practices: At times in the postapartheid era, the SABC has been run as a professional public news service; at others its operations are impelled by the bottom line (the government funds less than five percent of its running costs) and, at still others, it becomes a political grazing ground for the ruling party faithful. Often these trajectories coincide. But the nub of the problem lies deep in the institutional culture that, despite numerous changes in executive leadership, has not changed much. This culture affects editors’ and reporters’ ability to investigate stories and break new ones.

During apartheid, black reporters who reported news for the African-language stations were closely tracked by (white) supervisors who spoke vernacular tongues and checked that news broadcasts did not offend government

sensibilities. At times, black reporters were even whipped into submission. “If people were fortunate enough to be called to a disciplinary hearing, they could choose to be sjambokked [whipped] rather than fired,” one reporter testified to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that investigated apartheid atrocities.

Control of news was tight. An executive producer of an African-language radio current affairs show told me how, in the old era, he was assigned to interview a Bantustan leader (the stooges of apartheid who maintained the farce of black “independent” homelands). His briefing was not to ask questions but to just let the chief minister speak. And then he was not allowed to edit the politician’s musings: He had to play the tape in full on the current affairs show that evening.

## When Managers Intrude

The challenge today at the SABC is that many of these control structures still exist, albeit in a changed form. And while press attention (local and international) focuses often on the rambunctious changes at the very top levels, little attention is paid to its nether regions. In these provincial bureaus, several journalists, both black and white, who tried under the dire circumstances of apartheid to do their jobs with integrity, are now in positions of responsibility as regional editors (provincial bureau chiefs also responsible for the local radio current affairs shows), executive producers of current affairs shows, and senior reporters.

Covering provincial affairs is crucial to tracking democracy and providing citizens with information. Provincial leaders are responsible for delivering services—water, housing, health care—to those so long deprived by apartheid. Success can mean promotion to the national cabinet; failure can mean ignominy. It can also mean that voters get rough, and in the past two years there have been sporadic demonstrations around the country protesting lack of delivery.

Given these circumstances, a robust

editor and newsroom in a province can be a thorn in the side for an inept or tactless premier. In my years working at SABC I heard provincial premiers excoriate radio news anchors (who work in the provinces), slam regional editors for not providing coverage when they opened a public building, criticize reporters who did unflattering stories, and all the time find sympathetic ears among top management in Johannesburg.

Reporting provincial and local issues can be a lonely and sometimes dangerous job. In our worst case, a young provincial reporter, Sonnyboy Hlahane, who had covered local protests extensively, set up an interview one evening in a dilapidated rural area for a background story on the protests. The next morning the police found Sonnyboy's body in a pool of shallow water with strangling marks behind his neck and scratch marks on his arms, hands and wrists. That was more than a year ago. No one has yet been charged with his murder and only his local colleagues seem concerned by this.

At times the battles over news coverage in the provinces are tough. Regional editors must ensure that the television bulletins broadcast out of Johannesburg are serviced and that the local radio bulletins and current

affairs shows are accurate, fair and lively enough to attract listeners. But instead of empowering them to do their jobs, top managers in Johannesburg weakened them three years ago when, against protests of the news division, they installed regional managers in the provinces at levels above regional editors. In the news division, we were assured that our regional editors would still report to editors in Johannesburg, but we were concerned. These regional managers were given no staff and tiny budgets, yet they are paid big salaries and given generous car allowances and a mandate to be SABC "ambassadors" in their provinces.

In time, a measured campaign of interference began. It started in the far north when the regional manager would wander into the newsroom at deadline and "reassign" reporters already working on stories. A provincial cabinet minister might be having a cocktail function. "Go and cover that," he'd order a junior reporter. When I told him to stay out of our newsroom, he replied that he was "CEO of Limpopo" and could do as he pleased.

Soon the "big chief" culture spread. A regional editor in one province was hauled before a disciplinary committee by the regional manager for being absent for a day during Christmas

holidays, although as his editor I had approved his leave. Another regional manager called the newsroom on a Saturday afternoon to order a cameraman to a funeral of a powerful businessman, a funeral where this manager was the master of ceremonies.

The risks for regional editors and reporters are significant, and thus it requires courage for journalists to speak out against these intrusions into their work. Resigning or losing a job in a country such as South Africa, where the market for broadcasting skills is tight, particularly in African languages, is not an option that many newsroom staff can afford to take. But if the editors don't defend their space against these "ambassadorial" managers, who hanker for cozier relations with the local political and business leaders, public service journalism in our new democracy will be diminished. ■

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## Repressive Actions Give Way to Business Realities

'Independent newspapers and privately owned TV and radio stations lack the economies of scale necessary to become sustainable businesses.'

By Shyaka Kanuma

Until a few years ago, if a journalist in Rwanda published a story deemed unfavorable to the regime, police or unidentified "security operatives" would arrive unannounced and drag the frightened journalist or editor away to jail. For publishing "offensive material" they'd be locked up for months without a court hearing. Considered a punishable offense was writing an article accusing the ruling

party of governing autocratically. A number of journalists saw the inside of a prison cell after writing such articles. A few fled into exile and others decided self-censorship was the best way to go if they were to stay in business.

One John Mugabi of Rwanda Newsline, a Kigali-based weekly, published a story implicating a big army officer in the purchase of junk choppers for the military in a deal that would net

him \$600,000 in kickbacks. Mugabi was locked up on the day the story appeared.

Another journalistic offense, and not surprisingly in Rwanda a criminal one as well, is to write anything deemed hate speech. Amiel Nkuriza of the Kigali-based newspaper, *Le Partisan*, did that and served a three-year jail term without a court hearing. In his article, he questioned the "right of the Tutsi

[ethnic group] to govern the country given they are the minority and so cannot possibly govern democratically.” Nkuriza’s opinions echoed some of the ideas disseminated by the extremists who planned and instigated the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which many members of the Hutu ethnic groups participated in the mass murder of their Tutsi neighbors.

No journalist—or anyone else—spoke up for him to argue that it was excessive of the state to lock him up for three years while denying him the chance to defend himself. Because many in Rwanda’s news media were willing accomplices in the dissemination of the ideology of mass murder,<sup>1</sup> today the press is in the unenviable position of being trusted less by most people than the government.

The country’s new president, Paul Kagame, after conceding that the government has been on bad terms with the news media, has been inviting members of the media to his office for discussions on ways that the news media and government can make Rwanda a better society. After many excruciating years of open hostility, the realization seems to have sunk in that if Rwanda is to become a progressive, democratizing country characterized by rule of law, unbridled hostility to the media is not one of the ways to go.

This good news allows me to write a sentence that I could only have dreamed of writing just a couple of years ago: Today in Rwanda we enjoy press freedoms on a par with any Western democracy. This is not to say Rwanda has all of a sudden become a democracy. What we have is a progressive dictatorship with good intentions, but no safeguards exist to prevent it from returning us to the bad old days.

With the government no longer our main threat, we grapple with another major hindrance to our craft. Independent newspapers and privately owned TV and radio stations lack the economies of scale necessary to become sustainable businesses. The finances of running a private news organization in Rwanda are far different than in countries with longer established

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**The finances of running a private news organization in Rwanda are far different than in countries with longer established media that serve far bigger markets. Even before the mass murders and mayhem, the reality in Rwanda was that only government-owned media could operate with any regularity.**

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media that serve far bigger markets. Even before the mass murders and mayhem, the reality in Rwanda was that only government-owned media could operate with any regularity.

Slightly more than eight and a half million people live in Rwanda; 60 percent of them live below the poverty line (defined by the World Bank as surviving on less than one dollar a day). Radio is likely to be the medium most of the poor will have access to and only those who pay the price of a tiny transistor and batteries to power it. Even among the other 30 percent, a lot of those people are poor, though not destitute. They, too, depend on radio for entertainment and news. Only a tiny percentage of Rwandans own TV sets. A very few have the disposable income to buy newspapers and other publications regularly.

Given this environment, there is little advertisement money to be had. Yet for a good private press there exists a tiny, potentially profitable advertising

base, if one manages to sign contracts with a few of the nongovernmental organizations working in Kigali. These include local UN agency offices, Western aid agencies, a few airlines operating in Rwanda, five-star hotels, and some quasigovernment agencies such as those handling its procurement needs and a few others. Mainly these are job announcements or tenders to supply services and goods. Even then, these advertisers show a bias towards working with government-owned media. And why not? If they want to get work out to as wide an audience as possible, the government press is the way to go.

The independent press has never earned money and so it can afford neither the staff, the infrastructure (computers, printing presses, phones), nor the capacity to publish newspapers or broadcast on a regular basis. Small independent media are trapped in a vicious poverty cycle.

## The Courage to Try

It seemed crazy even to me when I decided to quit my job at UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in Kigali to return to journalism. But I did this with the idea of starting an English-language publication called Focus that would target its reporting on holding politicians and policymakers accountable, including the lawyers, information technology specialists, medical doctors, civil servants, and teachers who comprise the professional and powerful elite. Some friends saw the need for this kind of paper and pledged money to finance three or four print runs.

I removed all my personal savings from the bank and borrowed money from friends. I bought some desktop

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<sup>1</sup> Though almost every media organization became a tool of these ideologues, the most notorious accomplices were Hassan Ngeze, publisher and editor of the Kangura newspaper, and Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, founders of RTLM radio.

computers, paid rent for the office space, a phone line and an Internet connection. I hired three reporters, an office manager, and an editor. Soon we were in business in our 30-by-30 foot downtown Kigali office building. We outsourced advertisement operations to a small group of freelancers. Like all good salespeople, they badger me with concerns about projected circulation growths, demographics, the reach of our distribution network, and so on. I tell them it does not take much market research to know that a number of Rwandans have the money to buy a newspaper but were long ago put off by the mediocre products the market offered them. If we regularly put out a good product—a well-researched, well-written, rigorously edited weekly—I sensed there was a strong chance a whole lot of new read-

ers would surface.

In the five months that Focus has been in existence, we've fought in every way we know how to get readers. By May, progress was apparent. Our first issue sold 20 copies, but we took nearly a thousand unsold ones and distributed them for free as a promotion. The second issue fared better with 400 copies bought. Circulation jumped to 3,000 with the third and fourth issues. Two or three advertisement contracts have been signed, but we are not celebrating. Debts have accumulated to such an extent that Focus teeters on the brink of bankruptcy. But we hang on, knowing another jump in circulation will rescue us.

Starting a private paper here certainly requires a different kind of courage than was asked of us a few years ago in a country like Rwanda. Was courage what

drove me to do this? Of that, I cannot be certain. But I do know I wouldn't have lasted another month at my old job since I was ever more fed up with UN bureaucracy that made my work an ordeal. Whether courage led me to do this, I know now that courage is going to be necessary to keep us going. Some of that courage comes from knowing that my best contribution to a better Rwanda will only be made by being a journalist. ■

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## Burmese Reporters in Exile Confront Different Risks

Publications must assert independence from 'the international donors upon which they rely for financial support in the absence of a sustainable business model.'

By Aung Zaw

Power shortages and blackouts are nothing new in Burma.<sup>1</sup> Nor are news blackouts. In early February, authorities detected bird flu in Sagaing and Mandalay divisions but the news didn't appear in state-run newspapers or privately run journals until the middle of March. The government's mouthpiece, *The New Light of Myanmar*, waited until March 16th to report the outbreak.

Why do the authorities wait so long to inform the public of such an important development that directly affects them? The reason for this particularly cynical form of censorship has to be the official fear of causing a panic. Yet fears of a serious health hazard aren't

the only reason for Burmese to stay glued to the broadcasts of shortwave radio stations beamed from overseas. The plain fact is that most Burmese have no clue what is happening in their own country.

In Burma, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department (PSRD), once controlled by Khin Nyunt's military intelligence officers, is now run by Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan and a new director, Major Tint Swe, whose staff was increased to more than 100, some 60 of whom are charged with regularly monitoring the press. Despite changes at the top, there have been little signs of a relaxation of the PSRD's draconian censorship

regulations, which continue to stifle press freedom.

Critics of the regime are not wrong. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists branded Burma in its 2005 report on press freedom one of Asia's most repressive countries for the media. In February, Reporters Sans Frontières issued an urgent report saying that the military government is tracking down people who give information to the international media. Indeed, the threat to journalists in Burma remains a very real one, and to practice journalism inside the country—as it is meant to be practiced—requires courage, not only by individuals but also by the news or-

<sup>1</sup> In news coverage of Burma, the country is, at times, referred to as "Myanmar," a name given to it by its military government in 1988, or as "Myanmar, formerly known as Burma." Journalists who have written for Nieman Reports, including this author, chose to use Burma as the country's name, as do many news organizations.

ganizations that must decide whether to publish the information that solid reporting by their staff might find. On March 24th two photojournalists were sentenced to three-year prison terms for taking video and still photographs of the junta's new administrative city in Pyinmana. Twelve journalists are among the more than 1,300 political prisoners in Burma.

## Burmese Press in Exile

While some journalists inside Burma bravely continue to push the envelope, during the past decade Burmese-run publications in exile have flourished. Pro-democracy groups and journalists living in exile produce an array of print and online publications in English, Burmese and various ethnic languages. Many of these publications are based in Burma's immediate neighbors—Thailand, India and Bangladesh—and many receive grants and other forms of assistance from international donors, chiefly in Europe and America.

Since the host countries of these exiled publications enjoy press freedom, these publications have been able to remain highly critical of the Burmese regime's human rights violations and repressive nature. Even though the regime and its censorship board cannot put any direct pressure on these exiled publications, they are not without their troubles, and the work they do requires different kinds of courage to be demonstrated.

Increasingly, under the rubric of "constructive engagement," the governments of neighboring countries are forging closer trade relations with the regime in Rangoon. As bilateral ties between Burma and its neighbors strengthen, central authorities and local security officials in these countries have put more pressure on the editors of exiled publications. This has been the experience of *The Irrawaddy*, a Thailand-based newsmagazine published since 1993. Run by Burmese journalists, including this correspondent, *The Irrawaddy* offers critical coverage of the Burmese regime and has exposed its close ties with neighboring countries, notably China, India, Thailand and the

rest of Southeast Asia.

In the past, in response to "friendly requests" from the Burmese authorities, Thai security officials have asked exiled publications to shut down or relocate their offices for "security reasons." However, many continue to publish articles and editorials critical of the many questionable deals being struck between the generals in Rangoon and neighboring countries eager to do business with them.

Meanwhile, many exiled publications face pressure from other sectors of the exile community. Editors and reporters are often closely associated with political organizations or campaign groups. As a result, they tend to shy away from publishing critical commentary on the democratic opposition's weaknesses and sometimes flawed strategies.

In this environment, *The Irrawaddy*, an independent publication not affiliated with any political organization, stands out in publishing editorials and articles that are critical of the opposition in Burma and abroad. The publication of such stories is not done to agitate or denigrate Burma's ongoing "democracy movement," but to create healthy democratic debate, to restore a culture of tolerance and constructive criticism, and to educate the "democratic opposition."

While maintaining its critical stance toward the regime in Rangoon, the magazine often looks at and examines the opposition's shortcomings, including its lack of transparency, accountability and effectiveness. Reporting on these sensitive issues is not easy. There have been threats and intimidation from some opposition groups that ostensibly espouse the democratic principle of press freedom, but argue that the time is not right to start putting it into practice. "You can write freely when the revolution is over" is their common refrain.

Criticizing opposition parties or prominent figures such as Aung San Suu Kyi, who is still under house arrest in Rangoon, can provoke such a vociferous outcry from dissidents that some exiled journalists joke that their hard-hitting editorials could land them

in prison once they are finally able to return to a "free" Burma.

Over the years, *The Irrawaddy* has not only questioned the accountability and transparency of the exiled opposition, but has also exposed atrocities, including extrajudicial executions of alleged infiltrators, committed by rebel groups along the border with Thailand. As a result of these reports, opposition and rebel groups now exercise greater restraint in their handling of suspected spies in their ranks.

While the reaction to our efforts to hold opposition groups accountable can take a toll on the morale of staff members, especially those with personal ties to politically active fellow exiles, *The Irrawaddy* remains committed to serving its readers. We encourage our reporters to pursue any line of inquiry that will yield information of value to the public, without regard for how political groups or governments might respond to their revelations.

## Confronting Pressure From Donors

Burmese publications in exile must also assert their independence from other influences, namely the international donors upon which they rely for financial support in the absence of a sustainable business model. In the long run, some publishers and editors are concerned that this may prove to be the greatest challenge to editorial independence. Many Burmese publications in exile seek to diversify their donors, as they worry that depending upon a single source of financial aid makes them vulnerable to pressure from donors that take issue with the publication's reporting or editorial policies.

*The Irrawaddy* is among those exiled publications that receive funding from several international donors from European countries and the United States. Without these generous contributions, *The Irrawaddy* and most other publications produced in exile would not survive for long. But grants from international funding agencies can also bring their share of troubles to publications operating in exile. An incident relating to *The Irrawaddy* can

serve to illustrate the perils of relying on international donors.

In 2002, at a Burma Night panel discussion at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand in Bangkok, I came under fire from the former charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, Priscilla A. Clapp, for allegedly condoning the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. (The charge d'affaires has been the highest-ranking U.S. diplomatic official in Burma since the United States downgraded its diplomatic ties with Rangoon in 1988.) Clapp, who was a guest of honor at the Burma Night discussion, was invited to make a closing remark on a panel discussion, which included this author.

She first praised the "very good journalism of The Irrawaddy" before she said, "I remind [the editor of The Irrawaddy] that he is highly supported by the American government, and we did notice his editorial in the Thai press saying that America deserved the attack on September 11." She continued sternly, "That does not go unnoticed in Washington."

Just after the September 11th at-

tacks, I wrote an editorial on U.S. foreign policy that appeared on The Irrawaddy's Web site, as well as in the Bangkok Post. This opinion piece was indeed critical of the Bush administration's foreign policy, but did not say that the United States deserved the attack. Clapp apparently believed she was entitled to make this unwarranted and undiplomatic assault on me because I am the editor of a magazine that has been receiving grants from the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a Congress-funded organization. NED supports several Burma-related projects promoting democracy, human rights, and media development.

More recently, in March 2006, another Burmese media group, the New Delhi-based Mizzima News agency, was told by NED to retract an essay that claimed that it advocates violence. Mizzima pulled the article, but the damage was done. A radical campaign group known as Dictator Watch issued a statement criticizing NED, calling it the "National Endowment for Hypocrisy."

NED insists that it was not engaging

in editorial interference when it called for the withdrawal of the commentary, but was merely taking action because Mizzima had violated one of the conditions of its grant agreement. (Under its charter, NED is specifically prohibited from funding groups that engage in armed struggle. Ironically, the chief editor of Mizzima was a former hijacker who commandeered a Thai Airways International plane to Calcutta from Bangkok in 1990.)

At home and abroad, Burmese journalists face sometimes daunting obstacles in their struggle to survive and preserve their editorial independence. Though the kinds of journalistic courage called upon in each circumstance differ, without strongly adhering to the stance of independence neither entity will function as it should. ■

*Aung Zaw is editor of The Irrawaddy, a magazine about Burma and Southeast Asian affairs, located in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand.*

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## When a Journalist's Voice Is Silenced

In using the Internet to share his views, Li Datong is 'breaking the wishes of authorities who would prefer he did not speak to the foreign press.'

By Philip J. Cunningham

Li Datong is difficult to locate at first. At a glance he could have been any one of a number of middle-aged bespectacled gentlemen taking a break over cigarettes and tea in the crowded lobby of the Poly Building, a multiplex sporting a modern theatre, art displays, a hotel and office block not far from his office at the China Youth Daily. I see a man emerge from the glare of sunlight, wearing a jacket but not a tie, waving me over to his table with a grin. That he had staked out a seat in the brightest yet most secluded spot

in the café is somehow fitting for a confident but determined local journalist stepping into the international media spotlight for the first time.

Embattled editor Li Datong appears to be in excellent spirits. He smiles often, and his eyes are clear and alert. Freezing Point, the supplement he edits for China Youth Daily, is closed down. He has been banished from the newsroom; within China, his name is blocked in search engines, but he is communicating in every way he can. Although he does not speak English,

he has during these winter months shown an unprecedented willingness to talk to the foreign press, in translation, in the hope that some of what he has to say will be translated back to Chinese and distributed domestically. In doing so, he's breaking the wishes of authorities who would prefer he did not speak to the foreign press. [See accompanying box of excerpts from a critical memo Li Datong wrote to his paper's editor in chief and circulated through the Internet.]

It's February, and in the last few

## Words That Made a Difference

*In the summer of 2005, Li Datong, editor of Freezing Point, a popular supplement that he edited for China Youth Daily, wrote a lengthy memo to the paper's editor in chief, Li Erliang, and the editors' committee in response to a set of Appraisal Regulations that he believed would adversely affect basic news standards and practices at the paper. According to a Washington Post account of this incident, without telling the editor in chief, Li Datong posted his letter on the newspaper's computer system before he went into the staff meeting where this new system was to be discussed. Only at the end of this meeting did he announce what he had done. By then, his memo had been leaked and was spreading across the Internet, and copies were posted on China's most popular Web forums. Soon the government's Internet censors scrambled his words and ordered many Web sites to delete his letter. Two days later, confronted with public outrage at what the editor in chief planned to do, the plan was shelved. Li Datong's letter, in its entirety, can be read at <http://cryptome.cn/li-datong.htm>*

*In his letter Li Datong, who had worked at the China Youth Daily for 26 years, responded to the introduction of a numerical system that would reward reporters based on the kind of praise their articles receive.*

As I read these regulations, I could not believe my eyes. When a report or a page received the highest accolade from the readers, only 50 points is awarded. But if a certain official likes it, there is at least 80 extra points up to a maximum of 300 points! Even worse, in the section on "subtracting points," points will be deducted when officials criticize it. What does that mean?

This means that no matter how much effort was put into your report, no matter how difficult your investigation was, no matter how well written your report was, and even if your life had been threatened during the process (and enough reporters have been beaten up for trying to report the truth), and no matter how much the readers praised the report, as long as some official is unhappy and makes a few "critical" comments, then all your work

days he has spoken to Asahi Shimbun, Die Zeit, Kyodo News, The Yomiuri Shimbun, Financial Times, and CNN so that he might continue to say what he wants to say, albeit indirectly, to the people of China and, more critically given his battle of wills with certain party censors, the leaders of China. When asked if he is being followed or monitored, he grins again. He seems unfazed even though the answer to both is in the affirmative.

"I watch the traffic for signs of being tailed, and I sometimes say hello to the unknown people listening in on my phone, but I continue to do what I must do. I have nothing to hide," he says with gritty confidence. "What I do is legal and supported by the constitution of my country."

He explains that he was abruptly transferred out of the newsroom into

a research post, involuntarily, while his popular and sometimes controversial news supplement, Freezing Point, was closed down. He is guardedly optimistic about appealing the decision. I ask him if the article he published by Professor Yuan Weishi, "Modernization and History Textbooks," challenging orthodox views of Chinese history, was the reason Freezing Point got closed down.<sup>1</sup>

"No, of course not. They have been warning me for a long time, at least once a month. They didn't like my running stuff by Taiwan writer Lung Ying-tai and some other things. It's not one article, it's everything, everything we do in Freezing Point."

So why single out that article?

"That's just an excuse, they needed an excuse to close me down, and they chose that particular topic—his-

tory—because that's an area they can easily manipulate public opinion on," Li Datong explained.

He went on to say that China's press is freer than ever while paradoxically it remains as under control as ever. One way to illustrate this is an expanding balloon marked by a design that gets bigger as the balloon gets bigger.

In an Open Letter that Li Datong sent out via the Internet after his dismissal, in part, he wrote:

"This incident exposes the basic flaws in the news control system of our country. A small number of people in the Central Propaganda Department have a narrow worldview and mind and used dictatorial methods to impose controls that deaden what should be a lively political scene in which a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred

<sup>1</sup> In his article, Professor Yuan challenged the Chinese traditional view of history in which the Chinese are always seen as "good" and the enemies viewed as "bad." On the basis of his research, Yuan suggested that not all foreigners were bad and not all Chinese were good, an argument that touched on identity issues in China. Li Datong received some harsh responses to the article from readers.

is worth zero, you have added zero to the reputation of the newspaper, and your readers' opinions are worth less than a fart—in fact, you will be penalized as much as this month's wages!

Under this unreasonable system, the editors and reporters will go out of their minds instead of worrying about media's role to monitor. Oddly enough, the most basic and irreplaceable role for mainstream media to act as the conscience of society and to seek justice for the socially vulnerable groups is completely missing in this document about the appraisal regulations. This cannot possibly be explained as due to "omission" or "negligence."

*Later in his letter, Li describes how he views the situation the China Youth Daily faces in the new, more market-based environment of China's 21st century urban economy.*

The very cold facts are that the China Youth Daily is facing serious problems in terms of surviving and developing. The circulation is decreasing from year to year. The adver-

tising revenue is not worth mentioning. The newspaper had a significant operating deficit last year. At the same time, many urban newspapers have begun to look and act like mainstream newspapers, including their responsibility to report. They are getting better with the news and commentary. In terms of business, there are numerous newspapers that make hundreds of millions per year from advertisements ... the mainstream newspapers in China are now facing a bad situation in their business. This reflects the choice of the readers; it is also the choice of the market. As to how to deal with this highly competitive situation to restore the party newspapers to prominence, the choice is obvious. There is no choice but to win the trust of the people, like Marx's "people's news": "It must live among the people, it must share the problems and pains with the people, it must love and hate with the people, it must fairly tell all the things that people hope for and suffer from." Marx emphasized: "The trust of the people is the condition for a newspaper to live. Without this condition, the newspaper will shrivel." ■

schools speak out. These people want obedience and not equality. Which item in the party constitution of the Communist Party lets them do that?"

In some of his writings in defense of journalism, I'd noticed that he quoted Karl Marx, including a counterthrust he directed at his boss when he'd said "the trust of the people is necessary for a newspaper to live, without which it will shrivel." When I ask if invoking the name of Marx to protect press freedom is an example of using the red flag to fight the red flag, he gathers his thoughts, then smiles. "It's more like making sure whatever trick they try to use rebounds back on them."

Listening to Li Datong, his intense gaze broken by someone walking by, I'm reminded of the comment Malcolm X made about sitting in shops. Keep

your back to the wall, remain alert. Li Datong pauses in speaking only rarely, focused as he is on the flow of thought, deeply committed as he is to

that his traditional platform for expression has been taken away. ■

*Freezing Point resumed publication on March 1st with a different appearance and without the editorial leadership of Li Datong and his deputy editor, Lu Yuegang. The first issue included a state-mandated apology for running the Yuan Weishi article that, as Li explained, neatly frames for its readers the shutdown as an issue of nationalism.*

*This article was adapted from what Philip J. Cunningham, a 1998*

*Nieman Fellow, wrote in February 2006 and was posted on Danwei, a Web site that provides links to Chinese publications. His original article is available at [www.danwei.org/media\\_and\\_advertising/li\\_datong\\_meets\\_the\\_press\\_by\\_p.php](http://www.danwei.org/media_and_advertising/li_datong_meets_the_press_by_p.php)*

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**... within China, his name is blocked in search engines, but he is communicating in every way he can. Although he does not speak English, he has during these winter months shown an unprecedented willingness to talk to the foreign press, in translation, in the hope that some of what he has to say will be translated back to Chinese and distributed domestically.**

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the cause of keeping his compact with his readers.

It's clear that Li loves his job and is a newspaperman through and through. He is very much of the ink and paper tradition, but he is quickly learning the power and speed of the Internet now

# Journalism's Triumphant Journey in Nepal

'With the royal regime's overt intentions to muzzle the press and radio, journalists have fought back to keep autocracy at bay and the flame of freedom burning.'

By Kanak Mani Dixit

Before the 1980 plebiscite, the world of Nepali journalism was mostly form and little content. We called ourselves journalists, but not many of us were that, if you regard journalism first and foremost as a freedom forum to speak truth to the powerful state. The journalistic energy was concentrated in the tabloids like *Bimarsa*, *Samikshya*, *Dristi* and *Desantar*, which sought valiantly to make up for the lack of civil society, free courts, and political parties.

The reporting tended to be weak, but the papers, printed on cheap newsprint in cold lead type on treadle presses, provided plenty of opinion. These published opinion pieces reflected as much dissidence as was possible under the Panchayat system of government that had been established by King Mahendra in the early 1960's. And the limits on the opinion press varied according to the regime's mood. In those times, if you were not a hack working for the government's *Gorkhapatra*/*Rising Nepal* or a regime-sympathizing "Panche" scribe, you were considered a "partisan" journalist. Journalists who did not particularly like the autocracy, but did not want to be associated with the banned political parties, took the path of apolitical journalism—writing and reporting on culture, language, literature, travel writing, and so on.

## The Transformation

Journalists pushed the envelope of freedom after 1980 and helped greatly in creating the conditions for the People's Movement of the spring of 1990, when windows were forced open to let in the air of freedom. Public support and market expansion helped buoy the world of journalism. Newspaper distribution expanded with the spread of highways,

and economic expansion, in turn, generated advertising, so we found it was possible for broadsheet newspapers to survive with market revenue.

The decades-long pent-up demand for information in a newly literate nation was rapidly filled by several broadsheets, including *Kantipur*, which was started by some maverick businessmen and touched the pulse of the moment and sold well. Before long, a need was felt for the kind of analysis provided by newsmagazine journalism. *Himal Khabarpatrika* introduced this genre, which marked the second leap in print journalism after the arrival of *Kantipur*. And those who had predicted the death of the political weekly had to recant, as the tabloids have remained among us, daring to go where the corporate publications fear to tread. And with a surge in daily or weekly tabloids, journalism spread throughout Nepal.

The countrywide spread of journalism has taken full advantage of new electronic and digital possibilities, including fax, mobile phones, satellite connections, and the Internet. All this has helped the news media play a unifying role in the midst of our unsettled and stressful recent times. Nepali bloggers are active in spreading personalized news and opinion. Compared with other South Asian countries, Nepal's photojournalism and political cartooning have evolved rapidly and now provide reaction and relief as the country has descended into political anarchy and violence.

Since 1990, the Nepali journalists' learning curve has been very steep. In earlier years, we did not take full advantage of our available freedoms because many of us were so inexperienced as journalists, even if some of us were advanced in years. Journalists, for example, did not perform strongly

as watchdogs over political parties and governments that came to power after 1990. For a while, in the initial years of the Maobadi "people's war," there was romanticism in the press coverage, and to this day (with exceptions) there is fear among journalists when it comes to covering rebel atrocities. And when Chairman Gyanendra (the royal monarch who ruled Nepal) started to show his autocratic ambitions, with the backing of the military, many news media practitioners were exposed as men of straw.

Perhaps because journalists were so dramatically aware of what the Panchayat period had done to freedom of expression, and to Nepal's prospects generally, they were immediately cognizant of the ramifications on their work when the royal coup of February 1, 2005 took place. Since then, working with the Nepal Bar Association, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists has played a central part in the fight for pluralism. With the royal regime's overt intentions to muzzle the press and radio, journalists have fought back to keep autocracy at bay and the flame of freedom burning.

With the rise of the Maoist rebels and the king's repressive rule and militarization, journalists were confronted by challenges inherent in living up to the highest principles of their vocation. They've had to fight government censorship while also guarding against self-censorship, which has taken courage, and they've had to show courage under fire as they've worked under the threat of commissars and gunmen. They have resisted demands of soldiers who have entered into their newsrooms and recording studios, and many of them have remained at the forefront of news and analysis while they've watched others go silently

into hiding. When news organizations that had talked loudly suddenly went quiet, it was left to individuals like the redoubtable Rishi Dhamala to keep his Reporters' Club of Nepal going. In April, during the time of street protests against the king's rule, Dhamala and two other journalists were beaten by police as they closed down a program organized by the Reporter's Club in Kathmandu.

At a time when so many other sectors of society failed the people of Nepal, journalists will one day be forgiven for basking in well-earned credit when peace and democracy return.

But even as Nepal moves towards democracy, journalists must maintain

their standards of self-criticism and improvement. Journalism today is still riddled with weaknesses, despite the impressive journey we've made so far. In the future, we will have to work at dramatically increasing social inclusion within our ranks and ensure that the journalists in the local districts are paid at a level befitting their competence and role. Publishers must not shy away from competition, and we must inculcate higher standards in training as well as fostering investigative journalism.

For now, the journalists of Nepal can take satisfaction for being in the midst of the good fight. Let no journalist complain of how difficult it is in the profession today: It is a privilege

provided by the people, to be able to make a difference. ■

*Kanak Mani Dixit is editor of Himal Southasian and publisher of Himal Khabar Patrika. He started his career in journalism with an article in The Rising Nepal in 1971. This article is adapted and updated from a story he wrote in February for The Kathmandu Post. During the recent toppling of the royal regime, he was arrested and spent several weeks in jail, where he gave interviews by cell phone and wrote articles clandestinely.*

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## Threats Come at Journalists in Pakistan From All Sides

Despite gains in press freedom, news organizations and reporters engage in self-censorship as a strategy to protect themselves and their business.

By Beena Sarwar

**W**hen I think about courage in the context of my country, Pakistan, I am reminded of the Cowardly Lion who went looking for the Wizard of Oz so he could get courage and then realized he actually already had it. It strikes me that reporting honestly and fairly—what the best of journalism should be about—requires courage whenever the surrounding climate is geared towards suppressing the truth, as it is in Pakistan and so many other places today.

Despite press freedom in the United States, for example, many journalists still find it hard to question authority, investigate corruption, or follow up on unpalatable truths. Some who report on government and politics in Washington, D.C. have told me about the self-imposed restraints that creep into their work. Other conversations reveal that many U.S. journalists are so afraid of being labeled “partisan” in their

coverage that they do what they can to accommodate “the other side.” Those who ask questions that are unpalatable to the administration find themselves being edged out of the circle of those privy to inside information or not called on during press conferences. Recently John Green, executive producer of the weekend edition of ABC's “Good Morning America,” was suspended after e-mail messages he wrote that were critical of President Bush and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright were leaked.

The more I learn about journalism in the United States, the more I believe that things aren't all that different with journalism in Pakistan. Even today, when the press situation is freer than it's ever been, what is happening in Washington is familiar to journalists in Pakistan who dare to cross swords with the establishment. There are, of course, more constitutional protections and

legal safeguards in the United States; much reporting about government abuses (Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib) is done without reprisal, even at a time of heightened concern about prosecutorial attempts to force journalists to reveal sources. Still, even in this reporting, few reporters have probed beyond the obvious transgressions of human rights: The focus remains on the whistleblowers rather than on those who are violating human rights.

In Pakistan, despite recent improvements in press freedom, dangers remain for those whose reporting takes them against the official version of the truth. There are numerous examples of what happens to these transgressors, well documented by watchdog bodies such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Among the tactics of intimidation used are phone taps, surveillance, threatening

or interrogating phone calls, or visits from intelligence agency personnel. Since the “war on terror” was declared, in which Pakistan is a key U.S. ally, Pakistan’s intelligence agencies have developed close links to their American counterparts, and this war is used as a handy excuse to intimidate the political opposition, as well as journalists who question official policy.

The cozy relationship between Pakistani and U.S. intelligence agencies means that “terror suspects” can be handed over to American authorities in Pakistan, though this practice is denied by both sides. Journalists fear that this is what happened to Hayatullah Khan, who was kidnapped by “unidentified gunmen” last December. Khan, who worked for the Urdu-language daily, *Ausaf*, and the European Pressphoto Agency in Pakistan’s tribal areas, is still missing. Colleagues believe his disappearance is linked to a report he filed that contradicted official accounts claiming that a senior al-Qaeda commander, Abu Hamza Rabia, died after munitions exploded inside a house. According to a CPJ report, “Khan quoted local tribesmen as saying the house was hit by an air-launched missile. He photographed fragments of the missile for the European Pressphoto Agency.” Using his photos, foreign journalists identified it as a Hellfire missile fired from a U.S. drone. CPJ went on to note that Khan received “numerous threats from Pakistani security forces, Taliban members, and local tribesmen because of his reporting.”

Intimidation and danger now also come to journalists from militant organizations that have gained in strength during the past few decades. Drawing strength from ethnic or religious polarization, members of these organizations have attacked reporters and editors, as well as buildings where journalists work. They’ve also gone after those who sell newspapers on the street. Arson and guns are among their weapons of intimidation.

When journalists offer support to colleagues in trouble, danger transfers itself to them in the form of threats,

intimidation and harassment. In 1999, journalists were involved in a campaign calling for the release of Najam Sethi, editor of the weekly *The Friday Times*, whom the government’s intelligence agencies had picked up after he gave a speech in “enemy territory” (New Delhi, India), in which he was alleg-

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**When journalists see what happens to reporters like [Hayatullah] Khan and others, it deters some from probing further into situations that should be more deeply investigated.**

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edly critical of Pakistan. A climate of menace descended on some of these journalists; a note delivered to the home of Ejaz Haider, a colleague at *The Friday Times*, warned him to install bulletproof windows in his car. Journalists Imtiaz Alam and Amir Mir, who had been writing about the intelligence agencies’ transgressions and also had been involved in the effort to free Sethi, had their cars set on fire outside their homes.

Other colleagues have faced consequences for what they’ve reported or for working with foreign journalists probing issues the government preferred to suppress. There are numerous examples, including several prominent journalists who had to flee the country after their interrogations by the intelligence agencies. Soon after freelance journalist Ghulam Hasnain “disappeared” for 48 hours in January 2002, he left the country with his family and for months he could not talk about his treatment at the hands of Pakistan’s intelligence agencies. Khawar Mehdi Rizvi, now in political asylum in the United States, knows, too, about the tactics of the intelligence agencies: He was a “fixer” who worked with the French journalists whom the Pakistani authorities arrested in December 2003 for being in an area they were not “authorized” to be in. He was held without any charges for more than a month and

then charged with sedition for working against the “national interest.”

There are some journalists in Pakistan (and throughout the world) who criticize these reporters as being “foolhardy.” They argue, perhaps rightly, that they should have obtained “versions” from the other side and presented them alongside the information they did report. Journalists in Pakistan often find it difficult to obtain such “versions,” given the secrecy culture of those who are in power. And given “the other side’s” power, if an attempt is made to obtain such information there is a good chance the story will not run either because pressure will be put on the editors not to do so or because the editors themselves might exercise caution through self-censorship.

When journalists see what happens to reporters like Khan and others, it deters some from probing further into situations that should be more deeply investigated. Imtiaz Alam, who started the South Asian Free Media Association in July 2000, observes that the Pakistani news media, while quite vibrant and critical, is “being gradually entrapped in an elaborate system of self-censorship,” as corporate interests increasingly set the nature of content and the direction of editorial policy. Given the climate in which they work, journalists are cautious in how they report on the army, the intelligence agencies, corruption and religious extremists.

Journalists who exercise their political right as citizens to peaceful protest also need courage, given the tendency of police to use tear gas and batons. Recently in Islamabad the police attacked and arrested journalists demonstrating to demand changes in the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), a law that gives sweeping powers to law enforcement agencies and to PEMRA.

For a woman in Pakistan, holding a job as a journalist comes with all of the challenges that women reporters everywhere face—trying to balance responsibilities of the home with those of the newsroom while proving themselves on the job in ways male

colleagues do not seem to need to do. This can push one into being sterner than one might like. It needs additional courage to do all of this in the traditionally male-dominated atmosphere that exists most noticeably in local language publications. There the newsroom environment is often hostile to the presence of women; Urdu newspapers, for example, persist in using bylines such as "By Our Lady Reporter" despite protests by journalists' organizations.

Women in the local language media are also often underpaid, have little or no job security, and no health coverage. For those of us who work in the English language press the situation is relatively better, given the more progressive atmosphere there. However, with the rise of private television stations and newspapers, the number of women journalists is increasing, even in more conservative small towns throughout the country. ■

*Beena Sarwar, a 2006 Nieman Fellow from Pakistan, will return to the United States as a fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. She is the former op-ed and features editor of The News International, former editor of the News on Sunday, and a documentary filmmaker.*

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## Self-Censorship as a Reaction to Murders By Drug Cartels

'The message of this newsroom assault was obvious: stop messing with drug-trafficking affairs.'

By Raymundo Riva-Palacio

Jose Luis Ortega Mata was a brave publisher of *Semanario*, a weekly newsmagazine in the Mexico-U.S. border town of Ojinaga, Chihuahua. He denounced drug trafficking in that northern region of Mexico and the relationship between drug lords with local police, politicians and businessmen. Early in 2001, he was about to publish a new report on how drug money was being used to finance political campaigns when a gunman shot him twice in the head, killing him on his way to his office.

He was murdered in February, and his death marked the opening of a violent five-year killing season against journalists in Mexico. Since then, at least 15 journalists have been killed or

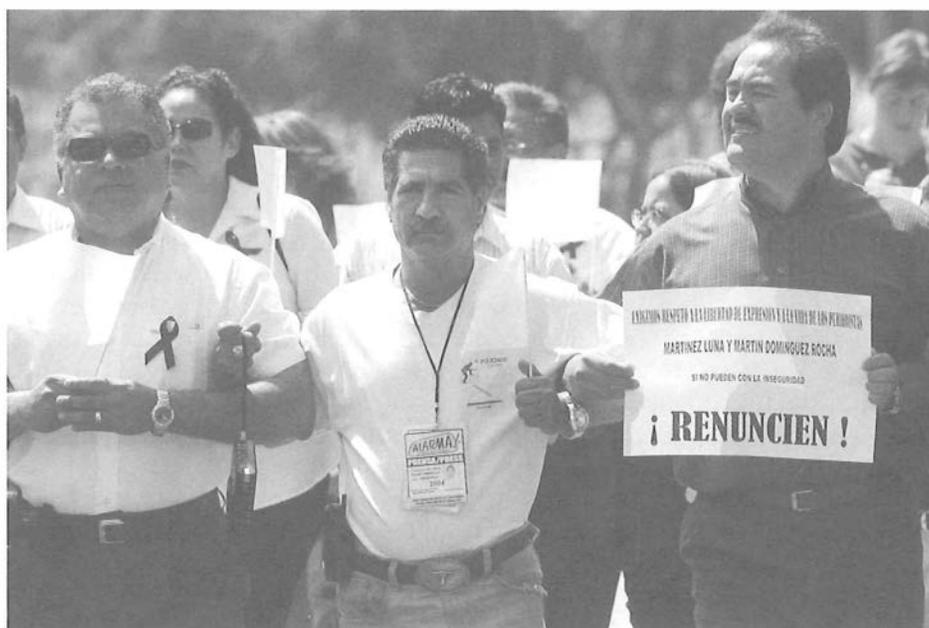
"disappeared" allegedly by drug kingpins, giving birth to a new phenomenon in the Mexican press: self-censorship because of fear.

Drug-lord mercenaries have expanded their original realm of violence from the border towns in the southern

United States to places such as Veracruz on Mexico's Gulf Coast and Acapulco on its Pacific Coast. Drug trafficking has expanded from only five regions, where it was concentrated 15 years ago, to the whole country; there are now 32 states where organized crime

is fully operational. This has created waves of fear that are felt even in Mexico City, which previously was immune to such clangers.

No journalist in Mexico who dares to write about drug trafficking should feel safe today. Since the federal government has been unable to stop the carnage, journalists who pursue this story have become the drug lords' enemy.



Mexican journalists march to the state attorney general's office to demand justice for the assassination in June 2004 of Francisco Ortiz, a Tijuana newspaper editor, in Tijuana, Mexico. The sign reads "Resign!" Photo by David Maung/Courtesy of The Associated Press.

- In 2004, Javier Ortiz Franco, coeditor of a leading investigative newsmagazine, Zeta of Tijuana, was in charge of a special task force appointed by the Mexican government and the Inter American Press Association to investigate the 1998 murder of Zeta's cofounder, Felix Miranda, and the 1991 killing of its columnist, Victor Manuel Oropeza, from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. That happened when he arrived home with his two kids; he was murdered in front of them.
- In February of this year, a few days after El Mañana newspaper cohosted a seminar in its hometown of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas about how to confront drug-related violence against journalists, gunmen stormed its headquarters. They fired assault rifles and tossed a grenade, injuring reporter Jaime Orozco Tey, who was shot five times. The day of the assault was a holiday, which explained why there was only one death, of a copy boy, and no other victims aside from Orozco.

The message of this newsroom assault was obvious: stop messing with drug-trafficking affairs. Its recipient was not necessarily meant to be El Mañana, but the Mexican press, as a whole.

### News Reporting Is Silenced

El Mañana was one newspaper that didn't need a fresh delivery of this message. Since 2004, when its editor, Roberto Javier Mora, was stabbed to death, the newspaper had begun to censor its coverage on drug trafficking and organized crime. Every drug-related story was published without any identifying details or further investigation. Nuevo Laredo is one of the two hottest places in Mexico where drug lords are fighting for control of the city. The main drug cartels, the Gulf and the Pacific, are trying to gain full control of that border town that is home to the main commercial border point of entry to the United States and the access to Interstate 95, which runs into the most lucrative emerging cocaine market in the United States. Dead bodies



Newspaper columnist Francisco Arratia Saldierna was beaten to death in August 2004 and his body left outside the offices of the Red Cross in the border city of Matamoros. Saldierna's column appeared in several papers throughout the border state of Tamaulipas.

*Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

are found almost every day in Nuevo Laredo from one side or another, and their names, background or liaisons are never published by El Mañana. The newspaper publishes only the body count on the city streets.

As with El Mañana, newspapers and magazines in many cities in Mexico have stopped giving details of the ongoing urban battle for markets and cities. In places like Tijuana and Hermosillo, Sonora, reporters stopped going to cover stories at night or very early in the morning because they fear it might be a set up. They have in mind the case of young reporter Alfredo Jimenez, from El Imparcial in Hermosillo, who disappeared in April 2005 on his way to meet a federal police source. Jimenez was a notorious investigative reporter who had several scoops on the whereabouts of a number of members of one drug cartel in the region. Federal authorities investigating the crime didn't know that Jimenez was fed information from a rival cartel to damage its enemy and, when the "enemy" found out the original source of information, they are presumed to have murdered him.

It is now presumed that drug cartels feed information to reporters to blast their enemies. A number of Mexico City reporters recently went into a panic after El Universal newspaper broadcast on its Web page the full video of the execution of one gunman of Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel hit squad. They realized they might have been used months before by the mercenaries that taped that video when they printed a description of the execution. When pushed by the federal authorities after the video broadcast to reveal who told them of the content of the tape before the Mexican government knew about it, the reporters decided to no longer pursue the story. A number of reporters who cover the federal police beat followed their colleagues' lead in solidarity.

Los Zetas is now synonymous with bloody violence, and a growing number of news outlets, most of them in northern Mexico, have stopped naming this cartel hit squad in their stories out of fear for their own safety. (Lawyers and media consultants pressure editors and reporters not to do

it, as well.) Even more dramatic, the highly respected syndicated column of reporter Jesus Blancornelas, the cofounder and former editor of Zeta who survived a murder attempt by the former all-powerful Tijuana Cartel, was cancelled by a number of newspapers in Mexico because of the sensitive issues he covers.

A few years back self-censorship happened for financial reasons as newspapers and magazines stopped fighting hard against government repression of the press. Although there were cases in which government officials put pressure on publishers and editors to fire journalists they felt were “uncontrollable,” there were only sporadic cases of physical violence against reporters and editors. These are new times. Now the drug wars provide new reasons for

self-censorship to exist. In 2004 and 2005, among Latin American nations, Mexico had the highest number of journalists killed, more than long war-torn Colombia and the highly unstable Haiti. This recognition is nothing to be proud of, and there are many reasons for journalists to still be afraid.

This year some Mexican news organizations decided to confront this challenge by working together. Their model is based on the U.S. experience of the Arizona Project, created by independent journalists to continue the work of investigative reporter Don Bolles, who was assassinated while researching mob activities in Arizona. The Mexican newspapers agreed to investigate collectively the whereabouts of El Imparcial reporter Jimenez and publish every step in their investiga-

tion on the same day, without a byline, to protect the reporters involved in the project. This is a unique experience for Mexican newspapers, whose relationship is usually characterized by envy and distrust. But now there is no other choice; they must come together to face the drug kingpins at whatever cost might result and regardless of what the government does. This is especially the case since so far the government is losing the war against the drug cartels. ■

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## A Quiet Courage

Journalists demonstrate this kind of courage ‘while attention is focused elsewhere.’

By Kathleen Currie

Journalists Carmen Gurruchaga from Spain and Jineth Bedoya Lima from Colombia discovered a common bond in Santee Alley’s open-air market in downtown Los Angeles. In October 2001, while strolling through this market that offers everything from imitation Kate Spade handbags to pots and pans, these women discovered they are both tenacious shoppers. Exhibiting their world-class bargaining skills, they nimbly manipulated shopkeepers in their native Spanish—each taking hardheaded stands amid moments of shared laughter—and in no time at all were weighed down with purses, shoes, dresses and the additional luggage they needed to haul their purchases home.

That night each woman accepted a Courage in Journalism Award, given to

her by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) for exhibiting journalistic tenacity. Gurruchaga spoke of her reporting on the ETA, an often

Bedoya Lima relived her abduction by paramilitary forces, who tortured and gang-raped her before leaving her bound by the roadside. [See her article on page 35.]

What these brave women share is the ability to deny the reality of danger in pursuing a larger goal. Intense and deeply committed to their work, I delighted in watching them also embrace together the joy they’d found that afternoon on Santee Alley.

Last month’s release of The Christian Science Monitor’s Jill Carroll after 82 days of captivity by gunmen in Iraq again fixed the spotlight on the

risks journalists take in doing their jobs. Armed insurgents know that journalists make high-profile hostages who bring with them sustained public attention. With 73 journalists and 26

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**When asked what help Western journalism organizations could provide her, she responded that we should remain silent. Too much public association with us would taint her and threaten her ability to remain in her country and continue reporting. She chooses to go it alone, relying on survival instincts honed through years of reporting risky stories.**

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violent and armed Basque nationalist organization, and recounted how members of the ETA had bombed her apartment, sending her and her two young sons scrambling from shards of glass.

news media workers killed since the war in Iraq began, there can be no doubt of the dangers journalists face in covering this war.

Carroll's release was justifiably and widely celebrated by journalism groups. Board members at IWFMF, where I work, voted only two days before her release to award her its Courage in Journalism Award. In October, when she accepts it, she will join 50 other women who have been its recipients, all of whom have demonstrated extraordinary bravery in their pursuit of international news reporting.

For the courage these journalists display, they deserve a rightful spotlight. For some, whose daily work continues amid unrelenting danger, public recognition can offer a mantle of protection as it forces authoritarian governments and armed groups to be wary of targeting them. There are other journalists who prefer to stay out of the spotlight, who want only to continue their work without fanfare, contending that too much attention can hamper their ability to report. They display what I call quiet courage, a kind of tenacious bravery that can be lonely and very hazardous.

## A Quiet Heroine

One journalist, a quiet heroine, works under an assumed name to protect her family, including her son. She faces repeated lawsuits because her digging is uncomfortable for government officials. For several years, she has been targeted for death by an armed group that has a particular fondness for killing journalists and a track record of making good on its threats. Not long ago she was again in court, defending a lawsuit that could land her in jail for years. When asked what help Western journalism organizations could provide her, she responded that we should remain silent. Too much public association with us would taint her and threaten her ability to remain in her country and continue reporting. She chooses to go it alone, relying on survival instincts honed through years of reporting risky stories.

Other journalists tell us that recognition would bring them too much attention in their newsrooms, where they battle to cover stories that go against the political grain in their countries and at their news organizations. They, too, ask to be passed over for awards.

There are still other journalists who

carefully balance what recognition means to their work. For 15 years, Shahla Sherkat, founder and editorial director of Zanan in Tehran, has written about women living under Islamic fundamentalism. She walks a tightrope, carefully measuring the words and stories she can publish while pushing boundaries in her country. If she falters, she risks a prison sentence and closure of her magazine. For many years she refused public recognition of her work. Finally, last year she traveled to the United States to accept a Courage in Journalism Award. Each word she spoke while in this country was carefully calibrated to be sure she could return to Iran and her work.

For her, as for others unnamed, passion lies in the work, not its celebration. This brand of quiet courage is practiced while attention is focused elsewhere. It, too, must be honored. ■

*Kathleen Currie is the deputy director of the International Women's Media Foundation. For more information on the Courage in Journalism Awards, go to [www.iwfmf.org](http://www.iwfmf.org)*

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## What We Learned About the Courage of Women Journalists

By Judy Woodruff

It was 16 years ago when a group of American women journalists convened the first international conference exclusively for women journalists. Held in Washington, D.C., this gathering evolved, as it was taking place, from one in which we thought the focus would be on rapidly changing technology and gender barriers to job promotion to one in which the sharing of harrowing reporting experiences emerged to become its core theme. Many of our visitors spoke powerfully of difficult and frightening on-the-job situations that most of the American journalists could barely imagine.

These women's determination to press on with their work in the face of various forces of government harassment and antagonism, as well as threats of violence from openly hostile criminals and insurgent groups, inspired the International Women's Media Foundation to create its Courage in Journalism Award. In the intervening years, what we've discovered is that despite living and working

in different countries on five continents, the courageous women who have received this award share much in common.

- Like Carmen Gurruchaga, Jineth Bedoya Lima, and Jill Carroll, many of the award's recipients have reported from the frontlines of a war—in some cases several wars. In 1998 in Kosovo, Anja Niedringhaus, a German photographer, was blown out of a car by a grenade while caught in crossfire, and the next year NATO forces mistakenly bombed her and several colleagues at the Albania-Kosovo border crossing. Just a year earlier, her foot was crushed and broken by a police car while she covered demonstrations in Yugoslavia. Kuwait, Iraq and the Middle East have also been places that drew her to their stories of war.
- Two of our recipients received their awards while imprisoned by their governments for what they risked their

# Truth in the Crossfire

In a brutal attack, 'my truth . . . was dealt a mortal wound.'

*Jineth Bedoya Lima, a reporter with El Espectador in Bogotá, was kidnapped and tortured by paramilitary forces in Colombia in 2000. In the Spring 2001 issue of Nieman Reports, she wrote about this experience as part of a collection of stories entitled "Colombia: The War Against Journalists," and that article is reprinted here.*

For many, working as a journalist in Colombia is exciting. It's like experiencing the magical and unreal of what the world has to offer in the 21st century. But for those of us who, in addition to working in Colombia, live in Colombia and for Colombia, it is an exhausting workday in which day by day one gives up slices of life, and one experiences the spirit of death in each task. This is the reality left by the Colombian armed conflict: an undeclared civil war that, in the course of 50 years, has left thousands of persons killed, displaced, disappeared and exiled.

The confrontation, which includes, in addition to the political interests of the guerrillas, the far right-wing groups, the drug traffickers, the hand of the state veiled in impunity, places the press—and therefore the truth of what is happening in Colombia—in the crossfire. We are caught in a thick web that subjects its victim to awaiting the slow approach of any of its victimizers. As a result, we, journalists who have sought to scrutinize these dark webs of interests, have ourselves become their targets.

On May 25 of last year [2000], when I still thought truth prevailed over bad intentions and that it was the best protective shield for a reporter in Colombia, three armed men, who identified themselves as members of the paramilitary forces under the command of Carlos Castaño, kidnapped, tortured and assaulted me in the worst possible way. That day, my truth was caught in the middle of the crossfire

and was dealt a mortal wound.

Today, eight months after that terrible episode, I can't stop thinking so much of my own personal drama, but of the drama of Colombia, which also has a mortal wound in its truth. It is the sum of hundreds of atrocities: There have been towns razed by the lack of conscience of the guerrillas; peasants affronted by the barbaric acts of the paramilitary groups; children wounded by mines sown by terrorists; ideologues, professors and trade unionists subjugated by the black glove of power. And there is a latent foreign threat silently closing in with its winds of war.

It's Colombia. It's a country that has seen in recent years how freedom of the press has been at these difficult crossroads. But journalists here have a great responsibility not to grow weak in the face of the cynicism of its rulers and the muteness of its authorities. And in the face of the rulers and authorities,

personal freedom to report. Christine Anyanwu, who was editor in chief of an independent weekly in Nigeria, incurred the wrath of her country's dictator, General Sani Abacha, and was sentenced to life in prison for stories her magazine published. Gao Yu, a newspaper reporter based in Beijing, was imprisoned for "leaking state secrets" and served six years in prison before being given a medical parole; she remains in poor health.

- For some reporters, like Mabel Rehnfeldt of Paraguay, the violent response to their words spills over onto family members. In 1989, Rehnfeldt was attacked by an unknown man after she wrote an article about business/government scandals. About six years later, she and her driver were chased by a car with three armed men while she was in the process of investigating a gasoline smuggling ring. And in 2000, she was threatened with death. Three years later, as she continued her reporting, several people tried to kidnap her 11-year-old daughter.

In the face of such outright hostility, threats and physical danger, these women journalists have displayed excep-

tional courage. Recently, recognition has gone also to those women who have displayed moral courage as they stood up to subtle but hostile treatment by government officials who don't tolerate critical treatment in the press.

For those of us involved in their selection each year, their acts of courage remind us that in what they do these women risk not only their jobs, which is their livelihood, but also their lives and health and sometimes the well-being of those whom they love most. What we learn from each of them, as they speak to us about their struggles, is a common purpose that keeps them going, despite the risk. It is stunning in its simplicity: to report the news to their countrymen and women, who depend on the information for their lives and future well-being. ■

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journalists have also waged bloody battles that put us at a disadvantage since we are weaker, and that weakness places us in the sights of the guns. Yet we still have the indissoluble power of the truth, the same truth that is mortally wounded as it lies surrounded by politicians, police, soldiers and criminals. It is the same truth that eight months after I became disabused of many illusions, also enables me to continue living and writing a few lines. This same truth has spurred on the journalist in me, but that nonetheless has not been able to encourage the woman in me. It is merely the reflection of a country and the drama of many who, perhaps, don't have the good fortune to be able to tell their feelings to someone else, as I can now. ■

*Two years later, Bedoya Lima was kidnapped a second time. What follows are excerpts about this kidnapping from "Fifteen Years of Courage," a publication written by Peggy Simpson for the International Women's Media Foundation. Simpson, a 1979 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance journalist based in Washington, D.C.*

Bedoya was kidnapped again in early August 2003 by a FARC guerrilla who controlled the hamlet of Puerto Alvira and its 1,100 residents. FARC got a foothold in that region in 1996 and brought in coca crops... Bedoya had gone to Puerto Alvira to tell the story

of how it had been taken over by guerrillas in 2002 and held for more than a year. Some 70 families had disappeared in the FARC takeover and the entire village had been forced into cocaine production.

Bedoya and a photographer cleared the military checkpoint for the region but, after a six-hour boat trip, they had a rude shock when they arrived at the hamlet. "The guerrilla man in charge told us we had no business being there ... got really incensed, ordered our kidnapping," said Bedoya. "We were stripped of our cameras and our clothing and locked up in a house." FARC guerrilla's told the villagers not to feed them or allow them to contact anyone, and Lima was told she and the photographer were going to be killed. After six days of captivity, during which time a villager defied the order not to feed them, a FARC commander freed them, saying their imprisonment was all a mistake and against FARC policy. He also offered to reimburse the two hostages for loss of money, cameras and other equipment. "We didn't accept his apologies," said Bedoya. "I said I would never accept help from the guerrillas." ...

As traumatizing as the second kidnapping was for her, Bedoya resists labeling herself "courageous." She observes that "Courage is something that is very subjective. We can be courageous in certain circumstances and become real cowards in others. This

is my life. I love what I do. I go to the jungle on many trips to cover military opportunities. I know there is a chance of not coming back. There are fears. These are not personal fears, but more about my family and things that depend on me. And there are millions who read my work. This is my contribution to society."

Journalists remain as targets of the warring factions in Colombia, and Bedoya is trying to change that situation. "Armed groups believe that the press is part of the conflict, that reporters work for bourgeoisie media groups, who have the power and money in Colombia," said Bedoya, who is involved in Bogotá with what she describes as a "circle of journalists." She founded the group to try to educate the public, the government, the guerrillas, and the paramilitary warring forces about the role of an independent media. ...

Even though she admits "some days are still very difficult, when I remember what happened to me," Bedoya explained that the Courage in Journalism Award [presented to her in 2001 by the International Women's Media Foundation] gave her more courage to continue reporting. Now in her early 30's, her role models are older Colombian journalists. "They take their work very seriously, both men and women. ... Those who died became sources of inspiration. They gave their lives for the sake of information." ■

## Trauma Lingers After Escaping the Danger

'My whole world felt wounded during my first months in the United States: I could not sleep and, when I did, it seemed only to dream weird things.'

By Ignacio 'Nacho' Gómez

I remember when my friend kept asking me if I was the one who made a two-hour phone call from her apartment in Manhattan to a small town in the Midwest. For a year and a half I denied it because it was the number of a doctor who diagnosed

me as having posttraumatic stress disorder. I had stress, and trauma, and the syndrome, but what I lacked was the "post" part. When I go back to Colombia I know the risks will come back to me. When a person wants to ignore a weakness, he forgets it exists.

In my mind, I erased the doctor, too, until my friend one day asked me for this doctor's brochure that she had given me to read.

This friend was also the person who picked me up in New York on the day in 2000 when I arrived there

as a man without a country and after I'd walked up and down Manhattan and through Queens for almost 12 hours. The next day and for half of my third in the United States I slept on her couch after she fed me my first American-style meal. When I woke up, she and her husband asked me questions about what I'd been through, listened as I told them my story, and then gave me the brochure about a posttraumatic disorder institute that they had coincidentally received that day. When they did this, I tried to explain that I was not becoming a crazy homeless person but simply someone enjoying the feeling of walking around when nobody is going to rape you or shoot you down.

When I was on my own, I was really less in need of professional care; just being with friends seemed enough to help with the feelings I had. What was hard, though, was that I couldn't stop thinking about how defenseless Juliana was, a dear friend with whom I'd shared an apartment in Colombia, and how my mother and other family members were doing in Colombia. My whole world felt wounded during my first months in the United States: I could not sleep and, when I did, it seemed only to dream weird things. I never could stop the feeling of waiting for another possible attacker to come.

When I shared these feelings with a Colombian colleague, his diagnosis was immediate: "Paranoia," he declared. He claimed that he is also paranoid but told me he doesn't feel uncomfortable. He rids himself of the feeling by quoting firefighters who say "even false alarms save people." Not being paranoid, I think, can be a big mistake. For example, it might seem unlikely that a guy with crimson jeans and a yellow shirt would be a killer, but in my experience there was at least one who was. For this reason, I don't feel good when I see a guy dressed in bright colors.

For me, paranoia means having the awareness required to size up the issues with which we work. The Midwest doctor said he could cure me, but I wasn't sure that ridding myself of paranoia—which I felt was a fundamental

tool of survival while working in my country on stories about corruption or reporting war news—was a good idea. I never called the doctor again. Instead I decided to play some sports so I would sleep better, study, enjoy the country, and feed my dreams.

I sent the brochure about posttraumatic stress disorder to Colombia for other journalists who might be in need of this information. It described how psychologists were trained to listen and advise journalists after they'd experienced traumatic situations. With Colombian journalists, such situations were very familiar. In 2000, the year I came to the United States, there had been a huge number of death threats, killings and a brutal kidnapping. I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to leave—and in May of that year I did—but not all journalists were as lucky. Some friends went to Spain; nearly all of the exiled journalists drank a lot, became poorer, and sunk into deep depressions. Many colleagues I chatted with during my first months out of the country seemed not to be themselves—less than what they'd been in Colombia, as I was feeling myself.

After the September 11th attacks, a friend of mine, an elementary school counselor who was responsible for 21 kids who were experiencing sleep problems, talking about death, and not feeling "normal," asked me for this brochure. Their school was one of the first evacuated in the wake of the attacks. She also needed care such as I'd received, but she felt that the children had problems that required a lot more treatment.

## Journalists' Deaths

I had met my American friends when I went to Queens, New York to report on the killing in 1992 of a Latino journalist in the Little Colombia section. Manuel de Dios Unanue, the former editor of *El Diario-La Prensa*, the biggest U.S. Latino paper of his time, had been shot dead in a restaurant. He was a "crusader," according to *The New York Times* in its news coverage and editorials. The *Columbia Journalism Review* (CJR) suggested that his death

was the result of racketeering activities that were a part of the city's Colombian community, where he lived for decades. In the summer of 1994, the Committee to Protect Journalists asked me to check on both of these versions from inside the neighborhood.

At the time of his death, Unanue was publishing a series of the Colombian mafia leaders' biographies and heavily criticizing the mafia's influence in the community's life. He was obsessed, too, with *El Espectador*, the Colombian newspaper that reported on drug trafficking, which had put more than 14 journalists on a list of those silenced by death and a car-bomb explosion that almost destroyed its entire plant in 1989. Unanue had gotten fired after publishing some editorials at *El Diario-La Prensa* that pushed against the mafia in the neighborhood and did so by naming names. The CJR reporter understood the complaint as extortion; but for most of Unanue's readers, it was clear that this Puerto Rican journalist wasn't one of the mafia.

At the time I worked for *El Espectador* and had become almost an expert on the topic of journalists being killed by the Colombian mafia. In mid-1986, when I got my first assignment to do a story on drug trafficking, three journalists covering this beat had been killed. By the end of the year, when the paper's managing director, Guillermo Cano, was shot down in front of the newspaper, there had been five deaths in that one year. I learned a lot helping U.S. reporters to do articles about how our country had the highest murder rate of any in the world, about shootings that were happening in the streets, and the hunting of spies and mercenaries in Colombia. These reporters found me because my closest coworkers had either been killed or had to flee. I'd become the obituary correspondent and the contact person for those who had to flee to the United States, which I've had to do two times.

The death that hurt me the most was Julio Daniel's. He was a terrific writer, a reporting partner of mine. He dared to do the series "What Violence Has Left" as he visited the places that were deserted after the 36 massacres I'd

reported on in 1987 and 1988. He and I kidded each other and talked to each other constantly as we wondered aloud why we were doing this kind of work. Julio used to say that he'd decided to give his life for this story because he felt we could be killed even by a stray bullet. We had expressions we used with each other to rank the danger involved with each story we did: "You smell flowers," or "You're going out with the foot first," or "You lost your head on that," all of which were mafia metaphors. Julio wasn't killed in 1991 for being a journalist for *El Espectador*; he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I've had some dreams with Julio's ghost and, eight years after he died, I think at last I felt some of what he felt. That moment happened when I walked out of the door at the military prison after I did my last interview for *El Espectador*. In a week I'd received 65 letters of hate and hundreds of hate-filled phone calls. My life was surrounded by guns, some of them for my protection. This moment will never be

erased from my mind.

I went to the United States because of my friends. They convinced me that it would be a good place to "neutralize" the powerful interests about whom I'd written in my story. My article had focused on the time and place coincidences involving a colonel, who masterminded a 1997 massacre (he was the person in the military jail), and 12 members of a group of U.S. Army trainers. What was hard for me to explain to my Colombian friends was that if Americans were the subjects of the piece, why I would leave to go to America. For me, I understood that the United States doesn't work like my country. In fact, the journalist I admire most was an American, Gary Webb, another "kamikaze" or "crusader" whose investigation of CIA involvement with Colombian cocaine traffickers to support the Nicaragua war appeared as a lengthy series in the *San Jose Mercury News*. The government sued him; he was fired from the paper and, after being found not guilty by a jury, he committed suicide.

I remember the fears I had when I was reporting the massacre story. At the time, the U.S. Congress was discussing big military involvement in Colombia. But when I heard the personal testimony of people who lost family members in the Mapiripán massacre, I knew I had to tell this story. That's my duty.

In 2001, I was ready to go back to Colombia, even though many news organizations were closing down. To me, this meant there would be less risk for journalists; fewer journalists would equal, in my mind, fewer attacks. The feeling I had as I returned to my country was that with all that the war in Colombia had done to all of us, I was returning to live in a place where there was bound to be an epidemic of posttrauma disease. ■

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## Persevering Despite the Dangers

El Tiempo's investigative editor 'has become accustomed to receiving floral arrangements and notes sent to regret her death, a form of indirect death threats.'

By Mauricio Lloreda

Where does courage intersect with journalism? This is a question with many answers, particularly in Colombia where war over drugs, territory and power has been with us—and taken many lives from us—for several decades. In my country, courage is inherent in the daily practice of journalism given the environment in which we, as reporters and editors, must function. At the end of the day, courage for us is just an act of faith—our faith in the hope that our images and words, storytelling done in any way, can help shape the society we live in and keep it from collapsing into complete chaos.

There is a direct connection between the environment in which a journalist works and the effort or courage needed to report. When on a battlefield, the fact of journalists being there speaks to their courage. Once the reporter is there, words or images transmitted have courage as their foundation. To place oneself in the line of fire with the sole purpose of witnessing and reporting to others what's happening in a place of danger is very much about this kind of courage. Words and images are what people often rely on to shape their sense of reality and might be used by those who read or hear them to change the course of events. The es-

sence of courage in journalism comes down to this: What needs to be told is more important than the well-being of the person doing the telling, who risks all to gather information.

War photographers and investigative journalists, particularly in countries where what reporters and editors do inevitably touches sensitive and powerful interests, know this lesson all too well. In Colombia, we certainly do, for in our country so many journalists have been threatened or harmed or lost their lives in the pursuit of information about the warring factions who fight over drugs, land and power.

Marta Soto is the head of the inves-

tigative unit at *El Tiempo*, the largest newspaper in Colombia. In such capacity she daily deals with a steady, unending stream of situations that pose all kinds of risks: politics (the extreme right, extreme left, and extreme civil society), drug trafficking, intervention by the United States, negligent and corrupt governmental authorities, and corruption in the private sector as well. When all of this gets mixed together, what gets forced out are the extremes of journalism. Too often reporting has resulted in the death of reporters or editors, or what happens is that silence descends; this is not to be confused with self-censorship, since silence can be a strategy taken simply to survive.

During recent years, Soto has become accustomed to receiving floral arrangements and notes sent to regret her death, a form of indirect death threats. All kinds of threatening phone calls come her way. She is also often followed on the street. Whatever might scare her is tried. She constantly monitors her bank accounts after learning about an attempt to deposit a large sum of money in her account as a way of involving her in some dark plot. Those intimidating her—and other journalists, as well—are dangerous people. FARC, on the political extreme left, is an internationally recognized terrorist organization that is responsible for thousands of kidnappings and murders each year. The paramilitary units on

the extreme right are similar, and the Colombia drug cartels need no introduction; they've earned a worldwide reputation for their brutality.

Soto perseveres despite the dangers, and she teaches other journalists about how to survive in these trenches. Last year she was invited to a journalism school to give the students some guidance about covering drug trafficking. Her wise words offered a lesson in courage as she spoke to them about how to weigh risks and, in part, rely on instinct to survive. A few days after she left, drug dealers went into the journalism school and killed or wounded many who had heard her speak.

My sense is that the courage necessary to undertake all of this begins well before a story is reported or a photograph is taken. This courage is inherent in the search for the truth and the need to cast a light on what is happening so that the evil is exposed instead of being allowed to fade from view. In my work as a reporter and columnist at *El Tiempo*, I've been a privileged witness to such moments and had to decide whether to denounce a situation regardless of the possible consequences I might face. Consequences can be immediate, but what these tell you as a journalist is that some part of society needed to be touched and situations needed to be brought to light.

The courage journalists display is

echoed in the work of others who also decide to write about critical issues while understanding the personal harm that can come to those who do. Their writing is not unlike ours, nor are the risks they take. Such a person is Peter Bunyard, a scientist from Oxford University, who tirelessly travels through the Amazon basin in Colombia—to places where even the Colombian army takes many preventive measures before entering. And he doesn't cease from letting others know about the risks to humanity involved with lowering the Amazon's water and devastating its forests.

I think there is also a hidden courage in those people who live in a developing country who choose journalism as a career. In such countries, journalism is a very low-paid job, but to be able to convey messages of great importance is a great reward. Doing good journalism is synonymous with courage. As journalists, we live to open our eyes and see what others sometimes refuse to see. And we cannot go on without knowing what others might be too frightened to uncover. That is what makes us courageous. ■

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## Death Threats Are Sent to Try to Stop Reporting

'If I kept writing, I thought, the threats would eventually stop because they weren't working.'

By Kim Bolan

When I got my first death threat in December 1997, I didn't take it too seriously. As a reporter for *The Vancouver Sun*, I had been digging up new information on a group of militant Sikh separatists believed to have been responsible for the 1985 Air India bombing. I knew I

had been stirring the pot and making some people feel uncomfortable, and police had warned me that I might be threatened as a tactic to get me to stop my investigations and articles.

The letter that arrived in the newsroom late in the afternoon two days before Christmas was juvenile. It incor-

rectly called me a man, "a bad man." It said I would be killed if I did not stop writing about a Sikh leader who was later charged in the bombing—Ripudaman Singh Malik. The handwritten single-page note also targeted a local Sikh newspaper publisher I had interviewed for a few of my stories—Tara

Singh Hayer.

“You die, Hayer man,” it said. “You die like Gandhi woman.”

I didn’t like the message, but I didn’t realize at the time how significant and prophetic it would become in my life and my career. Instead of finishing my Christmas shopping, I waited in the newsroom for police to make what would become the first of many reports of death threats.

I remember feeling angry that someone was trying to scare me. I called several sources, including Hayer, to find out if they had been threatened. Some had. One woman had her house attacked. She ended up fleeing into the witness protection program. Hayer was already in a wheelchair after an assassination attempt from the same Sikh militants left him paralyzed in 1988.

Hayer was accustomed to receiving threats. He told me not to worry, to continue my stories because they were clearly pushing the right buttons.

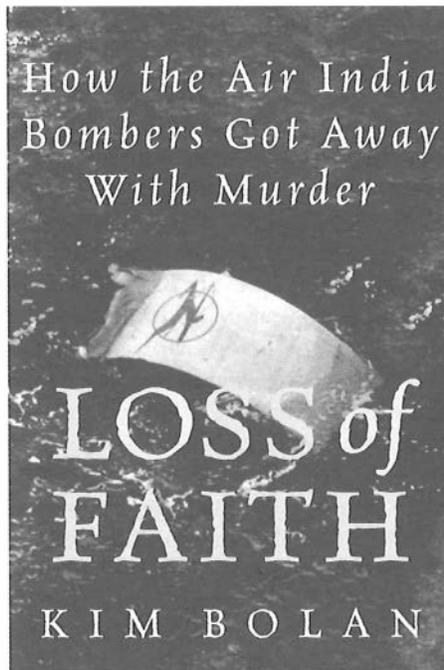
### Pushing Threats Aside

I did keep writing and the threats continued. Some were telephoned to the newsroom. Others were broadcast on unregulated Punjabi radio stations. A few were made to me face-to-face at events that I was covering. Eventually, a protest was organized outside my office, featuring several bombing suspects. And in July 1998, my house in Vancouver, where I live with my two sons, was targeted in a drive-by shooting.

I still felt, perhaps naively, that the objective of the threats was to stop the stories. If I kept writing, I thought, the threats would eventually stop because they weren’t working.

Several police investigations into activities of the Air India bombing suspects—activities that were independent of the acts of terrorism that left 331 passengers and crew dead—were launched as a result of my stories. Some charges, albeit less serious in nature than murder, were filed. Like any reporter who enjoys “gotcha” journalism, it was fun to see my work have an impact on a very frightening and small group of people who had gotten away with so many murders.

The Air India bombing, which was plotted and hatched in Vancouver, was the deadliest act of aviation terrorism in history prior to 9/11. The suspects weren’t hiding out in some mountain range in Afghanistan. Those responsible for this airplane bombing were living in opulent homes and running businesses here in British Columbia. They were



starting charities and opening schools to teach their philosophies to children, with the assistance of millions of dollars in government grants.

After I began covering them in an unprecedented way, a window opened in the local Sikh community. Some in the community finally felt comfortable enough to go to police with information about the bombing. I learned that even Tara Hayer, the Sikh journalist, had agreed to be a government witness in the case. There was a feeling that for the first time since the June 23, 1985 bombing, charges might finally be coming.

### A Reporter Is Killed

It was an exciting time to be a reporter. I felt like my work was really having an impact. I wasn’t really worried about the threats—at least until November 18, 1998. About 7 p.m. I got a call from my city desk as I sat in a movie theater with my two young sons, watching the

previews.

“Tara Singh Hayer has been shot,” my editor said. “He is dead.”

Just like the letter I had received 11 months earlier predicted, Hayer died very much the way that former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi had—gunned down at close range.

For the first time I felt fear. But I also felt like I had to write even more. Now I had to investigate and expose details of the plot to kill Hayer—the only journalist in Canadian history to be assassinated for his work.

The threats on my life continued; I ended up with periods during which I had bodyguards, special alarms, panic buttons, and almost ridiculous security. I moved from my home for several months. Events unfolded so rapidly that I did not have time to really reflect on what I had gotten myself into. The threats I received garnered media attention. I hated it, but also wanted to take advantage of the publicity to draw attention to the unsolved Air India case and Hayer’s murder.

Because of the coverage about my reporting, I was nominated for and then received one of the three Courage in Journalism Awards in 1999 from the International Women’s Media Foundation. I did feel a little awkward sharing the stage with an Afghani woman who had been beaten by the Taliban for her journalism, not to mention a radio station owner from Kosovo who had operated throughout the war. But I did try to use this opportunity to tell everyone I met about the injustice of the Air India bombing case and the fact that no one had ever been charged. Hayer’s murder also remained unsolved.

Finally, in October 2000, murder and conspiracy charges were brought against two British Columbia Sikh leaders—Malik, the man I’d been warned to leave alone, and Ajaib Singh Bagri, a mill worker who had made vengeful, hate-filled speeches across North America calling for thousands of murders. A third accused man later pleaded guilty to a small role in the plot.

I remember thinking that day about all the threats I had received, about Hayer dying for the story. I remember thinking that at least something good

has come out of it. The 19-month criminal trial that ensued got bogged down almost immediately with admissibility arguments and legal technicalities. After so many years, it was largely a circumstantial case, albeit a compelling one. One of my original sources, the woman whose house was targeted and who fled into the witness protection program, was the so-called lynchpin in the prosecution's case.

Families of the bombing victims were so convinced they would see convictions that they came from across Canada and throughout the world to crowd into the British Columbia Supreme Court on March 16, 2005. They left absolutely devastated when both men were acquitted.

### Reflecting On My Work

In the months following the verdict, I often questioned my sanity in sticking with the story as the hostility against me increased. I had assumed for years that justice would prevail, that it just needed to be helped along journalistically.

That had always motivated me as a reporter.

Many people had tried to help the truth come out in the Air India terrorism case—I had, along with other journalists, including Tara Singh Hayer, and several witnesses who were threatened and shot at and even investigators who devoted years to collecting information for the legal file.

I came to the conclusion that I could not leave the story now, in spite of the verdict—or really because of the verdict.

So I wrote a book that tries to shed light on all that went wrong. I have dug up even more since the trial ended a year ago. And I continue to receive new threats, including from two young men, whose fathers are both linked to the bombing suspects. They muscled me in a courthouse corridor in March and said I would get what is coming to me.

I don't think of myself as courageous or brave. I get annoyed and embarrassed when I am described that way. "No," I argue. "I am really just stubborn and obsessive."

I don't face imprisonment or state-sanctioned execution for what I write like many journalists around the world do. I don't like having police cameras peering out from my front door. I feel silly having bulletproof film covering my home's windows. But I do feel a sense of duty to my profession and to the people I cover. If I back down now, after all these years, the act of threatening will have become a successful tactic. More Canadian journalists will get letters like the one I got almost eight years ago. And my old colleague, Tara Singh Hayer, will have died in vain. ■

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## Challenging a Democratic Government's Secrecy

'Of particular concern to journalists is the lack of support some owners of Canadian news organizations have given as they've tried to contest these policies.'

By Russell Mills

In Canada, only a few major media companies exist, with a resulting high concentration of ownership. As a consequence, relationships that develop between media owners and government leaders sometimes impede the flow of information to the public, a situation that often requires moral courage to be shown by journalists, if they are going to do their jobs.

Since his election in January, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who is the leader of the Conservative Party, has attempted to control news coverage of his government in extraordinary ways. This has led to conflict with the Parliamentary Press Gallery

(PPG), the association of journalists who are responsible for covering the federal government. In spite of meetings between press gallery officers and the aides in the prime minister's office, restrictive policies remain in place.

Among these policies is one that requires ministers in Harper's government to seek approval from the prime minister's office before meeting with journalists and to have all interview topics and statements cleared with the prime minister's officials. This is a much more restrictive policy than followed by previous governments. A recent interview with the environment minister was cancelled at the last

minute when it was learned that the journalist planned to ask her about the Kyoto Protocol on the limitation of greenhouse gases, an agreement that Canada has signed but done almost nothing to implement. Ministers are only free to speak in glowing language about the government's top five electoral priorities. Ironically, one of these is improving the accountability of government. Communicating about any other topic is verboten.

Nor are journalists informed when Cabinet meetings are held; this is an attempt to be certain that reporters won't try to question ministers when they leave the room. Secret Cabinet

meetings had not been held for decades. The prime minister has also had his aides decide which journalists can ask him questions at press conferences, as they also try to control the subject of their questions.

The Conservative government's extreme crackdown is surprising since in its campaign the party promised openness and transparency. But it quickly assumed the label as the most secretive government in Canadians' memory. Perhaps the most controversial news ban imposed by this government has been coverage of the return of bodies of Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Many Canadians view this as the prime minister merely following the lead of President Bush's administration, with its adherence to the policy of a news blackout of the return of bodies of soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The PPG strongly resists this control, but little they've been able to say or do has made much difference. Of particular concern to journalists is the

lack of support some owners of Canadian news organizations have given as they've tried to contest these policies. An editorial in the *National Post*, which is the voice of CanWest Global Communications Corporation, Canada's largest media company, labeled journalists "whiners" for complaining about the ban on coverage of the bodies of soldiers coming home and other secretive policies. In an extraordinary attack on the PPG's battle against secrecy, CanWest's national newspaper said: "Get over it guys: the world does not revolve around your need to file 800 words for tomorrow's edition."

Staying on the good side of this government, regardless of its policies towards journalism and journalists, appears to be a major objective of Canada's largest media company, even when doing so is clearly not in the public interest. And this means that there are pressures placed on journalists working for the company. If reporters or editors try to work against govern-

ment secrecy, as journalists should do in the public interest, they are not only viewed as acting against the prime minister but they must act without the support of their publication's ownership.

This circumstance might not require physical courage of the kind needed in a war zone or when reporting in countries ruled by brutal regimes, but there is no doubt that standing up to both a government and your boss at the same time requires more moral courage than should be required by journalists in a country such as Canada. ■

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## The Courage of Journalists in the Middle East

'Acting with integrity means honestly probing the causes of the many problems and tensions that define the modern Middle East . . .'

By Rami G. Khouri

A journalist can choose to work courageously in the Middle East in several different ways, given the many dangers that define the news business in this region, including dangers from active wars, guerrilla and militia groups, state violence, terrorism, foreign military occupations and armies, political intimidation, and the power of mass public opinion. While there is heroism in working in the face of all these threats, my 35 years of experience lead me to believe that the greatest form of courage that a journalist can display in his or her work is to affirm universal standards of human rights and dignity by confront-

ing and challenging the power of the government and its security services. Honest journalism in the face of authoritarian regimes and police states is the highest form of courage, and the

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**Honest journalism in the face of authoritarian regimes and police states is the highest form of courage, and the most dangerous, in the Middle East.**

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most dangerous, in the Middle East.

Speaking truth to power, the late Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said noted, was the intellectual's

responsibility in the modern world. Doing the same thing in the news media is the defining characteristic of courageous journalism in the contemporary Middle East, most of which is characterized by a deadly combination: authoritarian or autocratic governments and public opinions defined often by mass anger and emotionalism.

The journalists I respect most in the Middle East, especially the Arab world but also in Iran, Turkey, Israel and other countries in the region, are those who confront the control mechanisms of their ruling power structure. They defy existing rules, run against

the grain of prevailing public opinion, raise unpleasant issues for public discussion, and demand that public or official power be exercised equitably and humanely, according to internationally accepted standards of democratic pluralism and human rights. Hundreds of journalists who have acted with such courage have been jailed, threatened, intimidated and even killed during the past several decades. Several prominent journalists have recently been killed or injured in bomb attacks in Lebanon. Their courage and sacrifice continue to inspire many of us in the news media who are committed to the quest for balance, accuracy, integrity, fairness, relevance and truth in our daily work.

In contexts such as the modern Middle East, journalism is not only a vocation for conveying information and providing entertainment; it is a critical tool for promoting coherent statehood, sensible governance, and basic decency in the lives of all men and women in our societies. In most cases the news media provide the only possible means of challenging official narratives, and those journalists who make use of that opportunity, at great risk usually, can often inspire other citizens to mobilize for the well-being of their entire country.

At its simplest level, courageous journalism may mean offering an opinion that differs from the government's, or proposing ideas that run counter to the dominant trend in public opinion. At its most complex and dangerous, it means challenging security systems and ruling oligarchies to be accountable, transparent and equitable in their monopolistic exercise of power. These are universal values, not particularly Middle Eastern: It was as difficult for an American journalist in late 2001 to suggest that American society needed to explore the full reasons for the 9/11 attacks, including backlash against U.S.

foreign policy, as it was for journalists in the Middle East to suggest that our societies needed to appreciate the many reasons why American public opinion enthusiastically supported military action after 9/11.

Another word for courage is the less flamboyant "integrity," a word that comprises professional, moral and political integrity in doing one's job as a reporter or analyst. Acting

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with integrity means honestly probing the causes of the many problems and tensions that define the modern Middle East and suggesting antidotes that offer a way towards a more stable, productive and equitable society. It means demanding that power in the hands of the state be exercised with a sense of responsibility, and within limits, while also demanding moral behavior on the part of private businesses, local traditional leaders, and civil society organizations. Challenging the governments of the Middle East, in particular, has meant demanding that the guns and money in the hands of the central government be subjected to mechanisms of accountability, whether through representative governance based on elected parliaments, the rule of law based on independent judiciaries, or more informal traditional systems of representation, voice and pluralism that are deeply ingrained in Middle Eastern cultures.

The modern history of the Middle East, especially the Arab world, has been plagued by police states that use violence against their own citizens

more than against external enemies. Governments for decades indiscriminately closed publications, jailed or harassed journalists, and used every available means of control and intimidation. They did this in order to present the citizenry with only the government's view of events, aiming mainly to perpetuate the ruling elite's grip on power. The government-disseminated view was usually incomplete, inaccurate and untruthful, designed to promote a citizenry of docile yes-men and women, unthinking and robotic nationals who make neither serious demands nor utter independent thoughts. The consequence is all around us today—a region wracked by home-grown violence and foreign armed occupations, corruption, abuse of power,

criminality, terrorism and a widespread desire among youth to emigrate.

Journalists who dare to challenge the prevailing power structure and demand a better and more just order in society represent one form of courage, alongside others who do the same thing in civil society, the religious and educational establishments, the world of arts and the business community. Journalists often are the first to make public demands of the state, challenge its use of power, or suggest a better, more humane style of public life and political authority. Their courage derives from their willingness to make the first move in tightly run societies, to be the first to challenge authority in public, to point out that the emperor is naked, and that the citizens are human. ■

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# Courage Can Mean Pushing Gradually Against Boundaries in Iran

‘Courage is not always about overcoming immediate dangers or reaching immediate ends.’

By Omid Memarian

“This is our responsibility,” said an Iranian journalist right after signing a letter to the prosecutor general of Tehran to stop the violence against imprisoned journalists. A week before the letter was written, in December 2004, I was released from jail. Altogether, 128 of my colleagues had asked the prosecutor general to stop intimidating imprisoned journalists in order to obtain confession letters. Such letters are used by the Iranian judiciary to instill fear among journalists and political activists.

I was one of the journalists who was coerced into writing a confession letter. And I did agree to write such a letter after spending 55 days in solitary confinement, experiencing irregular psychological pressures as part of a terrifying interrogation process, and losing all connection to the outside world. I agreed to do this so I would be released, knowing full well that the public would not believe such a letter to be true. This tactic is used by the Islamic regime regularly with prominent politicians, intellectuals and journalists who strongly insist on doing their job, even if what they say or write is in opposition to the government’s position. Their goal is to inspire fear among their colleagues. When used against journalists, the authorities believe they destroy their solidarity while also injuring them personally.

The story about my letter, however, received a great deal of coverage both within Iran and outside of it. When it was published, former President Mohammad Khatami established an investigative committee to look into allegations of torture and mistreatment in Iranian prisons. Normally

political prisoners shy away from attending such committees out of fear; usually, they remain silent, wary of the consequences of revealing what happens inside Iran’s notorious jails. However, I decided to attend the committee hearing with my friend Roozbeh Mirebrahimi. We gave testimony about what had happened to us, though we were terrified of what might happen as a result. Only a few years before a number of secular writers had been murdered by the intelligence services while undergoing similar arrest and interrogation methods.

Our testimony shocked everybody. The international community objected strongly to what had gone on inside detention centers, and the head of Iran’s judiciary met with us in a private gathering and promised to stop such violations. And the words we spoke to this presidential committee had an impressive impact on reforming Iran’s detention methods by clarifying the mistreatment of journalists who are detained. Many politicians told us that the publicity surrounding our testimony had made it incredibly difficult for the government to coerce journalists into writing confession letters. “It takes a lot of effort, energy and risks for them to do it again,” said Mashallah Shams ol-Vaezin, a prominent Iranian journalist who has himself been jailed before for more than 10 months, “now that everybody knows what happens inside detention centers and that these letters are worthless.”

Differing interpretations of law, blurred professional lines, and a general lack of trust toward the news media have turned journalism into a risky and dangerous profession in Iran.

During the past 20 years many Iranian journalists have been jailed, tortured, pressured and fired from their jobs. At the same time, however, the number of people who are entering this risky profession has increased dramatically. And that is why journalism seems insecure, risky and dangerous but also a task respected by the people. The motivating force that pushes journalists forward is the people’s demand for news, as well as their respect and appreciation.

I used to work at a newsroom in Iran with six other journalists. They were all intimidated by officials and constantly in danger of losing their jobs. But most of them, when they faced intimidation, came back to work after a while and continued writing, more seriously than in the past. As journalists, they believed in their commitment to tell the truth and cover the critical areas, but for many of them this was not possible to do. In Iran, many subjects that journalists would want to cover exist in the forbidden red zone: religious laws, clerics, Islamic foundations, high-ranking officials, corruption, bad governance, social problems, foreign policy, and so on. Though it is very hard sometimes to understand how journalists can do their jobs and keep themselves away from danger, this is not an excuse for many journalists not to cover these difficult topics. And when they do, journalists try to be careful, but none of them is safe.

## A Particular Kind of Courage

Consequently, journalists frequently pass over these zones. Seven years ago, while many secular writers were be-

ing murdered and fear was dominant, Akbar Ganji, an investigative journalist, wrote a series of bold articles in which he exposed the Iranian intelligence ministry's involvement in perpetuating these murders. The popularity of his writings forced the president to establish an investigative committee. This generated a public dialogue, albeit a censored one, on the issue of political murders. The government was finally forced to reform the intelligence service. Ganji, however, was sentenced to six years in prison for his writings. He never gave up and showed how journalism could effectively bring differences to the society.

Unlike Ganji, many other journalists shy away from such investigative work and write about social issues and matters that relate more to the daily lives of the people. Despite government censorship, they do their best to expose these problems. Often they shed light on the unknown, dark and hidden parts of the society and generate a public space for dialogue by bringing social and political issues to the surface.

These Iranian journalists show courage in their commitment to truth and understanding the dynamic of Iranian society today, through the motivation they have for change and improvement and by their persistence. Journalists who cover critical social topics take responsibility for what they report. With this approach, journalism is becoming

more than a profession; it is a valuable tool for social change. As this happens, the people in Iran provide support for journalists by creating an atmosphere in which it becomes possible to cover more dangerous topics.

Courage is not always about overcoming immediate dangers or reaching immediate ends. It can be based on journalists assuming strong responsibility and commitment to finding truth in ways that are possible for them. Iranian journalists report on poverty, prostitution, unemployment, drug addiction, crime and corruption in a country where any kind of criticism is considered to be "painting a black picture of the Islamic regime." They walk this thin line by connecting with grassroots organizations and employing a constructive tone. As a result, they've written many stories that have left deep impressions on the society and led to some kinds of change. Journalists, as an Iranian saying goes, "walk on the edge of the blade."

Moreover, in defining courage among the Iranian journalists, one needs to understand the nature of the government, society and the media. Sometimes even reporting on cultural issues, such as writing movie and book reviews, can be considered threatening, since the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that foreign enemies, particularly the United States, are unleashing a "cultural invasion" on Islam. Thus

journalists in Iran are faced with danger no matter what topic they are working on, so the work they do—while considered routine and ordinary in other places—can demand courage from them.

In the absence of freedom of expression, with suppression of civil society and political activism, journalists have become the nation's pioneers in defending human rights and promoting social change. In Iran's current political atmosphere, the news media play the role of political parties, civil society organizations, and educational facilities. These overloaded responsibilities put onto journalists, in an environment with an inappropriate proportion between the commitment required and freedom allowed, provide a situation that makes courage the determining factor in the lives of successful journalists. ■

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## Western Correspondents Display Cold War Courage

'I walked and cried. Death seemed a great relief but so difficult to find . . . . If only the interrogator would call me. I would admit anything.'

By Larry Heinzerling

If any Associated Press (AP) correspondent had been asked about courage in journalism in the 1950's at the height of the cold war, as the tempo of arrests, show trials and death sentences mounted behind the Iron Curtain, three names would have sur-

faced: Leonard Kirschen in Romania, William Oatis in Czechoslovakia, and Endre Marton in Hungary. All were imprisoned for their reporting.

Throughout Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, Western journalistic practices were regarded as a criminal, anti-

state activity, and all three men, aware of the dangers but doggedly pursuing their profession, fell victim to Stalinist regimes and their secret police.

Kirschen, a Romanian, the first arrested and longest held, was accused of spying for the United States and

Britain. He was an experienced, British-educated reporter hired in Bucharest in the post-World War II turmoil of January 1946. He was detained, tried and sentenced to 25 years in 1950, becoming the first known AP correspondent ever imprisoned. After 10 years of cruel confinement, he was released in 1960.

### **Kirschen's Interrogations**

His interrogations by the Romanian secret police went on, day and night, week after week, during which he was asked to write, then to rewrite, his life's history in a dingy cell. "We have methods to make you talk, and you won't like it at all," Kirschen was told. "You know, other people also tried to be clever with us and didn't talk. After we were finished they even told us everything they'd sucked in with their mother's milk during childhood." Kirschen recalled that at that moment he began to shiver. He was denied sleep and forced to keep writing the same thing over and over, as the interrogations began each afternoon and lasted until 5 a.m.. Then, wearing only thin, badly holed socks, he was placed into a room six by nine feet and ordered to "walk around his cell and think." Every six hours he was told to stop walking, and he was given a straw mattress covered with urine and bloodstains from the previous walkers on which to sleep. After two hours of rest he was forced to resume walking for another six hours. He wrote:

"I walked and cried. Death seemed a great relief but so difficult to find. I bumped my head against the wooden wall, longing for it. The warder lashed out at my feet with a belt. 'Get moving. What do you think you are doing?' he shouted as I tried to drag my feet along. If only the interrogator would call me. I would admit anything."

Eventually, unable to endure the psychological and physical torture any longer, Kirschen decided to "confess," signed a statement of guilt, and was taken to the prison at Jilava, a 19th century fortress intended for 600 men

but then overflowing with 2,500. In February 1960, as the international diplomatic climate changed, Kirschen was invited to apply to have his sentence suspended. Within days he was released. It had taken the U.S. State Department and the British foreign office a decade to win his release, all the while prodded by AP, which had supported Kirschen's ailing and destitute father and his wife.

Kirschen and his family moved to England, where he rejoined AP in London and developed a reputation as a commodities reporter. In an editorial appearing a few days after his death in 1983, the Times of London recalled his book, "Prisoner of Red Justice," published in 1963. "One of the best prison books amongst the many published by victims of Communism, this is also one of the least bitter," the Times wrote.

### **Oatis's Trial**

In January 1950, Czechoslovakia expelled all Western correspondents. AP's Czech nationals were ordered not to send stories abroad. The AP was allowed to reopen its bureau under William Oatis, of Marion, Indiana, later that year, but on April 23, 1951 Oatis and his entire Czech staff were arrested and charged with spying. Oatis was held incommunicado nearly 70 days before he was brought to trial. He was questioned around the clock, held in solitary confinement, and permitted no visitors, not even the U.S. ambassador.

In a staged trial before a Communist court, Oatis "confessed" to gathering facts about Czech agriculture and manufacturing production. In summing up, the prosecutor damned Oatis with remarkable praise, saying he was "particularly dangerous because of his discretion and his insistence on obtaining only accurate, correct and verified information." The U.S. State Department described the confession as nothing more than "the admission of an American reporter that in the high traditions of his profession was attempting under the most unfavorable conditions to report a true picture of conditions and events in Czechoslova-

kia as he saw them." He was sentenced to 10 years. His Czech staff received harsher terms. President Harry Truman denounced the trial as an attempt to intimidate the Western press.

"I was in prison in Czechoslovakia for over two years, and I can tell you this," Oatis reported later. "Living in that prison is like being buried alive. A cell there is like a tomb. And the inmate is like a man in purgatory. He is waiting, and his problem is to get through time."

The jailing of this American citizen became a major cold war incident. The United States cut off all trade with Czechoslovakia, travel there by U.S. citizens was banned, and Czech commercial flights to West Germany were prohibited. Oatis was finally released May 16, 1953 after his wife, Laurabelle, appealed personally to the Czech president. It was a seeming act of grace, but the Czechs were under heavy economic pressure, and President Dwight Eisenhower had held open the possibility of more normal relations if Oatis were freed. After recuperating from tuberculosis, contracted while he was in prison, Oatis eventually was reassigned to the UN bureau in New York, where he specialized in reporting about developing countries. He died September 16, 1997.

### **Marton's Dispatches**

Endre Marton survived the first years of Soviet domination in Hungary, including his coverage in 1948 of the sensational show trial of Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty. Marton's brush with authority came later but did not deter him from covering one of the biggest stories of the cold war. He and his wife, Ilona, who worked for United Press in competition with her husband, were arrested in 1955 and charged with espionage. He was jailed by a secret Hungarian military court for 18 months, she for half that time, alternatively threatened with execution and treated with relative leniency. They were freed in the more liberal political climate prevailing in the summer of 1956, just in time to witness the bloody uprising by Hungarian freedom

fighters, a pivotal moment that pitted students and workers against Soviet tanks brought in to crush the revolt.

On October 23rd, tens of thousands of Hungarians pushed into Stalin Square in Budapest shouting “Ruskies go home” and “Down with Gero,” the head of the Communist Party. The demonstrations mounted the following day but Marton, his communications to the outside world cut, was unable to send out stories.

Two days later, Budapest’s Parliament Square became a battleground. Marton was there when Soviet troops fired into a crowd of demonstrators. He had witnessed what he called “the story of my life,” but he had no way to get it out. He pleaded with a friendly official in charge of outgoing communications for access to a government building from which he could send his story. His contact agreed, but warned Marton: “I don’t think you can make it. You will be shot before you get there. It’s not worth it.” Marton reached the office and gave the telex numbers of several AP bureaus to a clerk. Marton waited several hours. He had never used a telex machine before. Marton described the scene this way in his book, “The Forbidden Sky”:

“The nighttime silence of the large room was suddenly broken when my machine sprang to life. I stared at it, waiting to see what would happen. And then, miraculously, the words appeared on the paper: ‘Associated Press, Vienna.’ I sat there, with trembling fingers, and punched back: ‘AP, Budapest.’ Back came the message: ‘Endre ... Is that really you?’”

The next day his story, the first eyewitness account, some 2,000 words long, was splashed on the front page of The New York Times and other newspapers around the world. It began:

“BUDAPEST, Hungary, Oct. 25—Parliament Square in Budapest became

a battlefield shortly after noon today when a Soviet tank opened fire on a few thousand peaceful demonstrators whose only weapons were Hungarian flags.”

The story reported as many as 200 or 300 dead. The fighting escalated and spread to other towns. Demonstrators armed with Molotov cocktails, homemade grenades and small arms, clashed with Russian forces in tanks

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**‘The nighttime silence of the large room was suddenly broken when my machine sprang to life. I stared at it, waiting to see what would happen. And then, miraculously, the words appeared on the paper: “Associated Press, Vienna.” I sat there, with trembling fingers, and punched back: “AP, Budapest.” Back came the message: “Endre ... Is that really you?”’ — Endre Marton**

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and the hated Hungarian secret police. On October 29th, the Hungarian army announced that Russian troops had begun to withdraw from Budapest. The following day, Premier Imre Nagy, the first leader in the Soviet orbit to attempt introducing “socialism with a human face,” announced the one-party Communist system had been abolished. It was a Soviet ruse.

On November 2nd, Marton reported Russian tanks and soldiers had returned and encircled Budapest as Nagy pleaded on Budapest Radio for the United Nations to guarantee Hungary’s independence. The Hungarian rebels had repeatedly broadcast appeals for support from the United States. The U.S. government had often spoken of “liberating” Communist countries and rolling back the Iron Curtain, but it did not intervene in Hungary. Direct intervention in Soviet controlled Eastern Europe would have been tantamount to declaring World War III. On November

4th Soviet troops overran the country. The fighting killed and wounded tens of thousands of Hungarians, and some 200,000 refugees fled to the West through Austria. On November 12th, the revolt crushed, Marton gave this overview:

“BUDAPEST, Nov. 12 (AP)—After 15 years under the heel first of Nazi Germany and then of Communist Russia, Hungary got a whiff of intoxicating freedom in late October.

“Then came Sunday, November 4th. Budapest was awakened by the roaring of guns. By authoritative estimate, the Russians had moved 4,600 tanks and between 180,000 and 200,000 men into Hungary to crush the revolution. Against this might, Hungary had nine divisions of 90,000 men or less, equipped with obsolete weapons, and kids, some with guns.”

In January 1957, Marton first received warnings he might be arrested again, followed by hints there might be no objections if he left the

country and, finally, word the regime would welcome his departure. The Martons and their two children decided to leave, traveling first by road to Austria and several months later moving to the United States. Marton continued his work with the AP in Washington, where he served many years as State Department correspondent. He died November 1, 2005 at the age of 95. ■

*Larry Heinzerling is The Associated Press deputy international editor for world services. He is among a team of nearly 20 writers, editors and researchers working on a new history of The Associated Press, updating Oliver Gramling’s “AP: The Story of News.” The stories in this article emerged from research for this book.*

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# A Difficult Journey From Repression to Democracy

Brave journalists who challenge authoritarian regimes often ‘enter a postauthoritarian era full of compromises and new repressions.’

By Ann Cooper

In August 1991 I witnessed some of the more courageous and world-shaking journalistic acts of the 20th century. On a mild summer morning, the masterminds of a hard-line Communist coup put Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev under house arrest. To ensure control over information, they shut down all but the most loyal newspapers and deployed tanks and soldiers to surround Moscow’s state broadcasting facilities. Then they ordered radio and television announcers to report that they took action in order to combat the “mortal danger” to the motherland posed by Gorbachev’s failed policies.

For a few hours, events played out like a theatrical revival of the heartbreaking Soviet crackdowns in Hungary and Czechoslovakia decades earlier. But soon a few journalists—some veterans of Soviet rule, others weaned on Gorbachev’s glasnost—stood up to fight. Editors of banned newspapers combined efforts to put out a daily called the “Common Newspaper” in defiance of the coup. A brash young reporter confronted the putsch leaders at a press conference, dismissing their phony propaganda and informing the nation, via live television, that a coup was underway. Hours later, television officials, their studios still encircled by tanks, snuck another electrifying report onto the air: the image of Boris Yeltsin, atop an armored vehicle, in dramatic defiance of the Communist takeover.

In the rejoicing that followed the coup’s collapse a few days later, jour-

nalists were among the heroes thanked by a deliriously grateful public. Their bold reporting had emboldened others; the Yeltsin image in particular telegraphed a message of hope in a time of despair.

I reported on these events for National Public Radio (NPR), having been NPR’s Moscow bureau chief for five

predictable. CPJ’s files are full of tales of brave journalists challenging dictatorship, helping push countries toward democratic reform, only to enter a postauthoritarian era full of compromises and new repressions.

Shortly after I arrived at CPJ in 1998, the Nigerian military strongman Sani Abacha died suddenly. Heroic editors

who had gone to jail or been forced underground for challenging Abacha’s corrupt rule were now free—and more than ready to build a national forum for vibrant debate. Instead, they watched newsstand sales plummet as a politics-weary public demanded more sports and entertainment. And they soon learned that even under an elected government some Nigerian police and security agents were eager to beat

or harass journalists for their critical reporting. [See article by Sunday Dare on page 15.]

CPJ has documented similar stories about the independent press corps that survived such dictatorships as Suharto’s in Indonesia and Slobodan Milosevic’s in Yugoslavia. These journalists, often at the forefront in demanding change under authoritarian rule, could be just as tough on new rulers at the first sign of corruption or human rights abuses. Like the Nigerians, they learned that just because elected leaders say they respect press freedom doesn’t mean they really do.

In 1991, I had not yet learned this lesson. Nor did I imagine that the press corps hailed for heroism in August of that year would be derided for corruption just a few years later. When

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**Some [Russian] media companies were rescued by rich oligarchs, but the exchange was that these new bosses often turned them into mouthpieces for their own political ends. Other news media made serious ethical compromises in order to survive: Selling news space to those willing to pay for favorable coverage became a routine business practice.**

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years. When I left Moscow one month after the failed coup, it was clear the Soviet Union was dead. Less clear was what would follow, though had I been asked at the time, I am sure I would have predicted that a vibrant, independent media would grow and thrive, and its existence would help shape some form of post-Communist democracy.

## Roadblocks Along the Way

Now, 15 years later, both Russian democracy and Russia’s independent media are in tatters. And as director of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), where I work in defense of courageous colleagues every day, I have come to believe that many of the difficulties encountered by media in post-Communist Russia were quite

Communist rule collapsed, many of the Soviet Union's thousands of media outlets were privatized. Without the party's financial subsidies, though, economic survival was difficult. Some media companies were rescued by rich oligarchs, but the exchange was that these new bosses often turned them into mouthpieces for their own political ends. Other news media made serious ethical compromises in order to survive: Selling news space to those willing to pay for favorable coverage became a routine business practice.

By 2000, when a new president, Vladimir Putin, launched fresh restrictions on the press, the audience for Russian news media saw journalists as so comprised that they were not deemed worthy of defending. That made it easy

for Putin to bring all national news broadcasting under Kremlin control and to effectively bar independent reporting on the country's most sensitive issues—in particular, the war in Chechnya.

Increasingly, opposition voices cry into a wilderness in Russia. A handful of newspapers with limited circulation might carry their messages. But under Kremlin pressure, few other media outlets dare run even basic campaign platform debates, rendering elections in Russia no longer free and fair. "We are hurtling back into a Soviet abyss, into an information vacuum," warns Anna Politkovskaya, perhaps the scrappiest journalist now working in Russia.

Russia today is not a dictatorship, but neither is it a democracy. Its media

are not Soviet, but neither are they free. What both need desperately is a new generation of courageous journalists—reporters like Politkovskaya, who has been arrested, poisoned and targeted with death threats for her dogged coverage of human rights abuses in Chechnya.

Brave voices like hers must survive to tell the truth, just as her predecessors did back in August of 1991. ■

*Ann Cooper served as executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists from 1998 until June 2006. She left to head the broadcast department at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.*

## Government Clampdowns on Newspapers Send Reporting Online

In Belarus, with many people not able to use their computers to read about what is happening, 'Online is not yet a worthy substitute for newspapers.'

By Andrei Khrapavitski

**B**eing an independent journalist in Belarus has always been a challenge. In recent years, news reports have been censored by government officials, reporters and editors have been arrested, physically attacked, threatened, expelled and one reporter disappeared and is believed dead.

Heading into the pivotal March 2006 election, in which president Aleksandr Lukashenko sought a third term, the situation for journalists grew even more grave. Fearful of another "color revolution," as happened in Ukraine and Georgia, government officials blocked any information (other than what they provided) from reaching the public. The state-owned newspaper distribution company, Belposhta, no longer allowed subscriptions to or the distribution of privately owned, independent newspapers. Another state monopoly, Belsayuzdruk, refused

to have any of these publications sold at the kiosks it controlled.

Since January 2006, 60 journalists were detained (28 before the elections, 36 on Election Day and afterwards, and three were detained twice). Of them, 34 were sentenced to imprisonment, nine were beaten up. Though our nation's "denim revolution" failed, this was not because of any lack of courage and determination by journalists. Rather, this political movement failed because the Belarus government shut down newspapers and succeeded in suppressing information about the opposition's ideas and candidates, a tactic neither the government in the Ukraine nor Georgia had used.

### Turning to the Web

Faced with the inability to circulate their newspapers, Belarusian journalists

turned to their Web sites in the hope of maintaining the flow of news—and the momentum toward democracy. This effort, which ultimately failed, demonstrated an important lesson for journalists throughout the world: Online is not yet a worthy substitute for newspapers.

Access to news is critical. When news is shared only online, people who don't have the ability to get to the information will be left out and therefore be uninvolved. In Belarus, as in most parts of the world, the Internet is still populated primarily by the young and educated. Data from the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies tells us that nearly one-quarter—some 23-24 percent—of Belarusians use the Internet; only half of these people do so on a regular basis. And pre-election polls indicated that the majority of those who support Lukashenko are

pensioners and people who live in villages or small towns—a group often far removed from modern technology. The vast majority of Internet users are based in Minsk, are under the age of 30, and have slow connections.

Being a reporter in the Belarus independent press guarantees neither money nor fame; instead it brings those who do it real problems and dangers. Despite these dangers, there are still hundreds who choose to keep reporting news during this difficult time. As Andrei Dynko, the editor of *Nasha Niva*, who was arrested and jailed for several days in March, observed about his newspaper's working conditions: "We have to ignore many laws—the 24-day annual paid leaves, maternity or sick leaves, maximum 40 hours of work per week, sanitary norms in the office, nightly shifts. I'm not even mentioning repressive regulations. We are distributing a newspaper which is banned from being subscribed to or sold in newsstands. Some women come to work with month-old babies to preserve the oldest Belarusian newspaper, the only one left in the country, published exclusively in the Belarusian language."

As Lukashenko's dictatorship in Belarus hardens after the harshest and most fraudulent electoral campaign in its history, being a journalist in Belarus demands real courage, sometimes heroism. Survival of the independent press is at stake, as government officials continue their crackdown on news coverage and its distribution and newspapers reach smaller and smaller audiences.

### Online Restrictions

The question journalists in Belarus confront is how to keep independent journalism alive. As reporters and editors and bloggers in Western democracies explore ways to transition news reporting from print to online, in Belarus this shift is happening, but not naturally or thoughtfully, as it should. The shift in Belarus is happening out

of desperation. And even with limited public access to Web sites, the government continues to harass journalists as they shift to publishing online. Yet journalists continue to use whatever means they can to get their words out and have their voices heard, even though many of these strategies require personal courage.

Under Belarus's media law, the court can ban a newspaper after two official warnings are given. One of the first closed publications was *Pahonia*, a major regional newspaper from Grodno, which criticized the govern-

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**The question journalists in Belarus confront is how to keep independent journalism alive. As reporters and editors and bloggers in Western democracies explore ways to transition news reporting from print to online, in Belarus this shift is happening, but not naturally or thoughtfully, as it should.**

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ment in overt ways. After its closure, *Pahonia* went to an online edition in an attempt to maintain its mission of providing the public censor-free news. But its problems did not stop. Editors Nikolai Markevich and Pavel Mozheiko were arrested and sentenced to a year and a half of "corrective labor" on charges of libeling Lukashenko in an online article.

*Nasha Niva*, a major intellectual publication, struggles to preserve its print version. But to accommodate its circumstances and its online possibilities, the publication switched from being a broadsheet to a bulletin-like format. The reason: *Nasha Niva* can be downloaded in a PDF-version, then printed and distributed by its readers to others who live nearby. Now authorities are attempting to ban the newspaper by closing its Minsk office and depriving *Nasha Niva* of its legal address. If this happens, *Nasha Niva* will lose its right to be published within

Belarus and would, most likely, move totally online.

*Volnaye Hlybokaye* and *Vitebski Kurier*, both newspapers, allow third-party Web sites, *Sumiezza* and *Vitebsk.by*, to re-post their articles online. And many well-respected news organizations provided RSS feeds to Weblogs on Election Day so that people could still have access to information, even if the publications' Web sites were blocked or hacked. Indeed, Election Day did turn into an online battle between Web administrators and hackers, with the former working to keep their sites updated and available, while the latter attacked them to try to disrupt the flow (and succeeded with some sites).

After the election, direct attacks on the Internet sites stopped, and Web sites containing the work of independent journalists continue to be accessible to those with the computer and wired connections to get to them. And with all of the actions against newspapers, independent print journalism could not be revived; the remaining few newspapers have had to move online as their only hope for survival. Even if all the newspapers fail, there will still be underground printouts, bulletins and Web sites that will deliver news to Belarusians.

Are these ways of distributing news able to substitute for the traditional print media?

In the opinion of many observers, not yet. ■

*Andrei Khrapavitski is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina School of Journalism, where he studies as a Muskie Fellow while researching the role of independent media in Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia. In Belarus he worked as a deputy editor at Volnaye Hlybokaye, founded an independent youth publication, Kanspekt, and worked in the network of resource centers fostering new media initiatives.*

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# Courage Emerges From the Work Journalists Do

‘... journalists’ courage needs a source, and so far I have recognized three such sources: insanity, lack of any clue, ideals.’

By Aida Cerkez-Robinson

**C**ourage. I think I’m the wrong person to talk about courage because I’m a coward. Being forced into action that might be described as courageous when you have no other option—that’s not courage to me. What many photojournalists and reporters did is courageous. But I will give you my observation and my opinion about it anyway.

I don’t think courage is a category that plays a role by itself. As far as I could see in the 15 years of working in journalism and surviving Sarajevo, journalists’ courage needs a source, and so far I have recognized three such sources: insanity, lack of any clue, ideals.

Either you are completely insane to voluntarily expose yourself to snipers, mortar shells, cold, hunger and the rest of the misery I saw within the besieged city of Sarajevo for more than three years. Or you decide to ignore the danger and do your job because you have never really seen a tank before and you have no clue what it can do to you, so you are not afraid of it, which describes my case at the beginning of Bosnia’s war.

I saw bombs in violent cartoons when I was little. However, Bugs Bunny would always appear alive in the next scene. I’d seen tanks before, but they did not appear that big and dangerous; they could all fit into a TV or movie screen, and they never shot at me but at someone else. So in my mind, the artillery that shot at my city in 1992 was always aiming at someone else, not at me; bad things can’t happen to us, just to other people. Civilians are in general unaware of what weapons can do, unless they’ve dealt with them before in army training.

The shooting started in Bosnia first in cities close to the Serbian border,



A Bosnian man cradles his child as they and others run through one of the worst spots for sniper shootings in Sarajevo. Easter Sunday, 1993. Photo by Michael Stravato/Courtesy of The Associated Press.

and although it was in our country we, in Sarajevo, still thought it was far away from us. Then it came closer and closer and artillery started pounding the Sarajevo old town. That’s not where I live, so in my neighborhood we spoke about how “this is not close to us,” without noticing how our safe world was shrinking.

The first idea of how close it had come was when I watched my mother preparing food at the stove next to the open balcony door while also watching nearby residential buildings being pounded by mortars. Just an average-sized park divided our neighborhood from those buildings, and when I warned her to go to the basement she replied, “This is not close to us.” I realized how stupid her comment was only because a day before a neighbor had described to me what a mortar looks like, and I understood that the gunner

only has to move the tube, maybe even by accident, for one or two millimeters, and his shell would land right into our kitchen. And that—was close.

Seeing people dying day by day, we—the army of the clueless—slowly realized it’s wiser to stay in the basement and not to come out until it’s over, which was three and a half years later. Some Sarajevans made it out and became refugees all over the world. I didn’t because I could not believe this could be happening to a city in Europe at the end of the 20th century and thought it would be over in a few days.

## Joining Journalists to Tell the Story

I joined the journalistic community basically because I felt I had to do something that makes sense and, I thought,

after telling the outside world what is going on, something will change. With this idea in my mind, I began helping foreign reporters tell about Sarajevo's reality to the world outside. The job drew me closer and closer to danger.

When danger occurs at some spot in the city—a square is bombarded and there are dead people—for everybody else in town, this information is a signal that one has to run as far away from that spot as possible. But you, as a reporter, are the one running in the opposite direction of the crowd—toward the bad spot, to see, to hear, to capture it in the form of a photo or TV footage, in order to show and tell the world what is going on.

I was not even afraid. I sat in trenches on frontlines without really knowing what the danger from the other side looks like. I never thought about it. I had no picture of it. It was abstract. I sat there in my pink overalls, white shoes, and camouflage helmet on my head that someone had given me. Even my outfit spoke about how clueless I was.

My frequent trips to frontlines—basically outskirts of my little town—ended sometime in 1993, after I saw a tank for the first time in my life, stood next to it, and realized how small I was compared to it and how I can't hurt it at all. That's when the fear came and the courage ended. The rest of the war I tried to keep a low profile, picked up tips from experienced colleagues on how to survive and kept going the best I could. Walking down the street was almost as dangerous as sitting in a trench at the frontline, but there was no other option for me. Here was my home, my friends, my family, my life, and it was under fire, being killed every day. Pushed to the corner, having nothing to lose, you somehow are forced to do things others may call courageous, but in fact you are just trying to survive.

## The Emergence of Courage

This was the difference between my foreign colleagues and me. This was

not their home. They had nothing to do with my city and my world; they came here as reporters and chose to expose themselves to what I was forced to endure. They were neither insane nor clueless.

I often asked myself why are they doing this then. The answer came one night, in the middle of the war. I was ready to quit, angry about the ignorance of the world toward the suffering of my city. The idea I started with crashed. The outside world did know what was happening; we told it,

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**... I saw a tank for the first time in my life, stood next to it, and realized how small I was compared to it and how I can't hurt it at all. That's when the fear came and the courage ended.**

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but it did not do anything about it. All the reports we were sending seemed to me like screaming into deaf people's ears—they produced nothing. So there was no point for me to continue.

I was all in tears when I was explaining this to one of my colleagues, who had left the safety of his life in Paris to come here and sit with me in this stupid, pointless misery. He was listening carefully and then said after a while: "So you were up to changing the world, and it didn't work. Now you are disappointed. You think it is not worth risking your life for nothing. Your goal was set too high," he said.

He explained to me that after World War II, many Germans were asked where they were when their Jewish neighbors were taken away in the middle of the night and where they were taken and what happened to them. The most common answer was: "I didn't know." The lack of information gives them some kind of amnesty, an excuse, since it opens the door for the possibility that, would they have known, they would have done something about it. But they didn't, so they are okay.

"See, I have chosen to come here to report about what is happening in Sarajevo. To provide the information. To make sure it's on TV, it's on the radio, it's in the papers. To make sure people can't avoid the information," this colleague told me. "Not because I think it will change something right away but simply to make the information available. So one day when this is all over one way or the other, nobody can use that argument. Nobody can say: 'I did not know.'"

That night I realized how simple, realistic and noble his motive was for exposing himself voluntarily to danger. Oh, man, it was worth dying for. He will not change the world himself and might not even see a change in his lifetime. But step by step, one by one, journalists slowly widen the consciousness of humanity. It's a profession that does offer the possibility to play a small role in the overall understanding that the world

is made of people who deserve our attention and action although they live on another continent. People do care about other people—they just have to know about them. Some people devote their life to being that connection between people, being that channel. This motivation makes journalists then also be courageous as a byproduct. You don't go into a war zone to report because you are a courageous person. You go because you believe in what you do so much that you get over the feeling of fear in order to achieve your goal.

The journalists who get their courage from the third source—ideals—those are the ones I envy. ■

*Aida Cerkez-Robinson has worked for The Associated Press in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina since 1992. She started as a fixer and translator, then became a reporter, and by the end of Bosnia's war she was AP's bureau chief, a position she holds today.*

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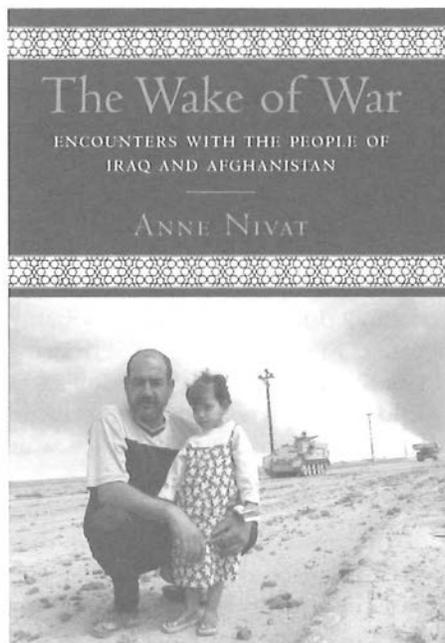
# Going to Tell What Others Have Forgotten

A war correspondent seeks out people who live in dangerous war zones to tell their stories and finds that ‘by sharing the fear it helps a lot.’

*On March 29, Melissa Ludtke, the editor of Nieman Reports, spoke by telephone with Anne Nivat, who was in France, having returned from reporting trips that took her to Chechnya, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. Nivat, who is a war correspondent for Ouest-France, was writing a preface for the paperback version of her most recent book, “The Wake of War: Encounters with the People of Iraq and Afghanistan,” which will be published in the fall.*

**Melissa Ludtke:** When you hear the word courage applied to what journalists do, what does that word mean to you?

**Anne Nivat:** For me courage is when journalists should be able to go to the field, stay on the field, and report from the field as long as something is going on there. Independently, if we talk about a war, on neither side, which means not to be embedded or to stay in a hotel for journalists but to try to make their way through the civil population. In other words, to blend in. Courage in journalism means not to be afraid of going back and back to the same place, trying to attract the public’s attention to forgotten wars, such as the war in Chechnya, to mention the war I know the best and the war that is completely forgotten by the mainstream media. Yes, courage in journalism is to have the will, to have the strength, to report about forgotten issues, forgotten places, forgotten people. Not to stick always with what makes the news, the TV news, which is obviously too light, too quick, too superficial. There is a need to take the time to go deeply into what is happening. Not to be made afraid by a complicated situation. To be capable of giving nuances, details—details, details, details—details about how the people live, how they survive, what are



they afraid of, what makes them dream, what do they dream about? To try to understand someone else’s mentality, forgetting your own frame. To be able to adapt, not only physically but also psychologically. That is what courage in journalism is today and, unfortunately, I don’t really see it, not often.

**Ludtke:** You describe two levels at which courage must happen for this kind of reporting to take place. One is courage within the institution of journalism to fight against the impulse to move on to the next story. And the other kind of courage would seem to be overcoming fear of not being safe, of not being well protected while you are doing your job.

**Nivat:** Yes, you are exactly right.

**Ludtke:** Maybe you could speak to each of these levels of courage.

**Nivat:** The institutional level of courage is more important to me than the second one because when you are a

war reporter, which is what I am, you don’t have the choice, you must overcome your fear. You must overcome your fear. You have no alternative. If you cannot do that, you cannot be a war correspondent. That is impossible. When you are such a journalist, you go where battle rages, where fear and death is everywhere; you will see terrifying things, and you have to be able to watch them, to be a witness. And to be a witness to me is not only to be there and watch and call your newspaper and dictate your article or send it by computer. It is to be able to overcome the indifference when you come back. From my experience, the most difficult thing for that kind of courage is not when you leave for the field but when you come back from the field—when you have to readapt to the normal life, to your personal life, to the life of an individual who most often lives in a democratic country, a rich country, a country with no war, and having in mind all you experienced as a war correspondent. Not to forget them—your experience and also the people you left behind. To continue being a witness. Not to jump from a war to another war, which has become very fashionable these days.

**Ludtke:** Recently you traveled to Afghanistan and Iraq. What part of these war stories did you feel you could tell that wasn’t being told? And was there some courage in trying to tell a different story?

**Nivat:** I think it is just a completely different perspective. For example, from my most recent trip to Pakistan, Afghanistan and to Iraq, a trip I made last winter to write a book that is coming out this spring in France, the perspective is told in the title of the book, “How Do the Islamists See Us?” How do they see us? This means it is

not another article about how we see them—meaning the West, the rich Western countries, Europeans and Americans, and how do we see them without really understanding them. But taking it the other way around—it is just the opposite. By going there and trying to meet with them, some of them being very, very anti-Western, and listening to them, listening to them without judging them, in order to get the most I can from them and to convey it back to my readers.

**Ludtke:** To do that required that you traveled out of protected zones, basically on your own, in areas that many Western reporters feel are too unsafe for them to go.

**Nivat:** Yes, that is correct, but that is exactly what I have been doing since the very beginning of my work as a journalist. I never travel with other people, and I never travel in secure zones. Never. My specialty is to go to these places—and to me, it doesn't sound difficult. It is not difficult to do: You just need to want to do it.

**Ludtke:** To you, it probably doesn't sound courageous either.

**Nivat:** And it does not even sound courageous. It sounds normal, because I think I can do it. Why shouldn't I do it, because I know I can do it?

**Ludtke:** Can you identify what inside of you pushes you past what ought to be a level of fear and allows you to take these risks that others don't take?

**Nivat:** I am not sure. Probably first it is a question of personality, of course. But secondly it has to do with my personal experience in Chechnya. I am absolutely convinced that what I went through in Chechnya is worse than everything else. And during my trips to Pakistan, to Afghanistan, to Iraq, and during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, traveling deeply into those countries, I have never felt the fear I could have had in Chechnya. In Chechnya I was inside the country with the civil population for nine months in a row under

heavy, daily bombardments from the Russians. So it can't be worse. In terms of security, it can't be worse.

**Ludtke:** That experience gave you some sense of confidence or some sense that fear is not part of your thinking. What was the legacy this experience left with you?

**Nivat:** I think it gives me the strength to go on, yes. I know what it is to be under shelling, in a terribly unsafe situation. I've been through that. I can't accept that to go to Afghanistan or Iraq today outside of the secure zone means the same level of danger. For me, it doesn't, but this is probably because I've had these experiences. If I had not had these experiences, I would probably not think the same way. So it is very specific to me, or at least I think so.

**Ludtke:** Even with this sense that you can handle it, do you still make judgments in the course of a day or a week when a particular risk might seem foolhardy to take rather than courageous? Is there a thin line that separates those two ideas?

**Nivat:** All of this is words, words and only words. When you are in a situation, when you are living a situation at risk, you have to be very cold-blooded. You have to have the ability to think very, very, very quickly about what is possible and what is impossible. You never know in advance, never. What I know is, and what I have always said to my colleagues back in France or to my loved ones, my relatives, is that if I know in advance that there is something that I would like to do and I cannot do it because of various safety reasons, I won't do it. I won't take useless risks. But it just never happened. I've never had to not go forward. But again maybe when you live in families, with the people, you share the fear with them. You are one of them at that time. It helps a lot.

**Ludtke:** By sharing the fear?

**Nivat:** Exactly. By sharing the fear it

helps a lot. The local people survive it, so why wouldn't you? And you are doing your job, and it is by being with them that I am at the heart of the events. If not, I feel separated. I feel no reason for me to be there.

**Ludtke:** Because you speak many languages and you are familiar with many ways that people use language, I am wondering if you've found that the word "courage" has different meanings when it is spoken about in different languages and cultures and whether its meaning changes.

**Nivat:** Oh, I think the word has completely different meanings according to the world you live in, according to the civilization in which you belong. The countries I most visit are Muslim countries, and I think for them courage has a completely different meaning than for us.

**Ludtke:** How does this difference show itself?

**Nivat:** I think they feel that we are civilizations that love the very notion of courage. We, Europeans, and of course even more Americans. Because they feel that we live in ultraprotected societies; that we have completely lost the notion of what is real, what is not real. They think we live in a virtual world, that we live in a bubble. By going to their countries, I sort of give them the feeling that yes, there are some people from that world who can still go and visit them and try to listen to them, to understand them. Some people here in the West think it is very courageous of me, but it is not again for me. It is not. And from their perspective it is not either.

But to come back to your first question, I think for me the very definition of courage would be to have the courage of another perspective. Not the one that is the easiest to have, but the perspective of the other. That is in our world very courageous. ■

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# Assessing the Risks Reporters in Iraq Confront

'I don't believe in the journalist as a hero.'

*John Burns, who is Baghdad bureau chief for The New York Times, delivered the 25th Joe Alex Morris, Jr. Memorial Lecture, held at the Nieman Foundation on March 9, 2006. This annual lecture honors Morris, a foreign correspondent with the Los Angeles Times who was killed while on assignment in Tebran, Iran in February 1979. Burns responded to questions, one of which focused on the adjustment he will undergo when he leaves Iraq by year's end and heads to London. He reflected on risks journalists confront in reporting in Iraq and how they cope with danger.*

I know it's not going to be anywhere near as exciting as what I'm doing right now, nor to be honest with you in the scheme of things as important to The New York Times. But I'm 61 years old, and I thought it was time that I tried to live a more normal life, though I'm told by my wife, among others, that this is beyond hope. I live in hope that a life in which I can go to the golf course every weekend is something that I can adjust to.

War is a narcotic; there's no doubt about it. The lives we live are energized by risk, and in the end I guess you'd have to say we live by it. Micah Garen, who's here tonight, has been closer to the edge of the abyss in Iraq by a long measure than I have been. He was kidnapped in August of 2004 during one of the Shiite uprisings and was extremely lucky to come back. It was a time of a great spate of kidnappings and beheadings.

It's somewhat unseemly to talk about risk. Ulla [Joe Alex Morris's widow] was telling me earlier that Joe Alex did talk about it but never actually believed that it would happen to him. I have a great passion for Formula One motor racing, and in the days when

it was absolutely deadly, which it no longer is, thank God, I noticed that the great racing drivers all believed up until the moment it happened to them that it wouldn't happen to them.

I think people generally speaking—and you don't have to be a correspondent in a war zone to say this—find coping with their own mortality a rather difficult thing to do. I regularly ask the correspondents in our bureau to address seriously the risks that they run.

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**I don't go anywhere without armed guards, armored car, very elaborate communication systems, which would allow us in the worst case, should we survive an attack, to call in American Medevac helicopters in a matter of minutes.**

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I said you should not be here if you are not prepared for the possibility that you will die here. It's a real possibility. And I say whether I personally would be able to do this or not, I don't know. Micah would probably tell me having been subjected to a lengthy kidnapping that everything changes when the gun is at your head.

I say to our people if at all possible, if it happens to you, remember the words of Robert Falcon Scott on his return from the South Pole in 1912, when he wrote in his diary on his last night: "We took risks, we knew that we took them. And now that things have turned out against us, we have no cause to complain."

You know, it's a well-rewarded life, I have to say. The heroes where I work are not journalists. The heroes are—it sounds a little bit self-righteous to say this—but the heroes are the people who endure these miseries and these risks with no hope of reward. There's

no front page and no lengthy holidays and no journalistic prizes for the people of Iraq who endure this. And neither are there, by the way, for American combat troops. You could say, well, they joined the military, they knew what they were doing. But they didn't have any choice in the cold light of dawn when they go out into the streets of Ramadi or the many other places they go where there are these deadly risks.

I don't believe in the journalist as a hero. We are very well rewarded for what we do. And I have to say in the case of The New York Times, at a time of some stringency in the economics of newspaper journalism in America, The New York Times, and the same is true of The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the bigger papers, have been unstinting, unstinting in their willingness to buy us as much protection

as we could possibly have. An armored car, of which we have several, costs \$300,000. I blanch when I think of the budget that we are running in Baghdad. And all we've ever heard from New York is the occasional—because The New York Times had to lay off last year some several hundred people across the United States through its various corporate entities as a matter of retrenchment—if you can find any savings, please do. We were never subject to mandatory restraints. So we are extremely fortunate in being afforded these protections.

I just want to say something else, because I think it's remiss of me if I didn't mention how Jill Carroll of The Christian Science Monitor is, after two months, still missing. [She was released in March 2006.] And if there are heroes in all of this, it's the Jill Carrolls, who venture out into the badlands with absolutely no protection whatsoever. I don't go anywhere without armed

guards, armored car, very elaborate communication systems, which would allow us in the worst case, should we survive an attack, to call in American Medevac helicopters in a matter of minutes. This is a very expensive thing to

do. Jill went out on that Saturday morning two months ago in a soft car with an interpreter and a driver—an extremely brave, some would say foolhardy and extremely foolish, thing to do.

I think it does raise the question of

responsibility. I don't think this will change. There will always be freelance correspondents in every war who will want to do this, but I think the days of freelancing into those shadowlands are probably at an end. ■

## War Teaches Lessons About Fear and Courage

'In war zones, I would learn about another feeling, one I have yet to define but seems the opposite of fear . . .'

By Cheryl Diaz Meyer

*Courage. I feel the tears push past my eyelashes as I reflect on the word because in my heart, I know that I lack it, and all I really want to do is crawl into bed and sleep so I never wake up.*

Working as a photojournalist, I've been through war zones several times in the past five years. I was there at the height of the war in Afghanistan, during the fall of Konduz, when the last Taliban stronghold in northern Afghanistan was destroyed. I was embedded with the U.S. Marines during the invasion of Iraq and later worked unilaterally at a time when the sectarian violence intensified.

One month after 9/11, I made my first trip into a war zone when I traveled to Afghanistan for The Dallas Morning News. In preparing for the assignment, I talked with David Leeson, my colleague at the paper who had experienced war before. "Are you scared?" he asked.

"No, should I be?" I replied.

He tilted his head to one side and arched his brows, as his lips curled up at the edges. But there was no humor in his expression, only irony.

At the time I was too wrapped up in the details of the preparations to think, much less to reflect on fear. In time, I would know its meaning because I would recognize it as a part of me, not unlike my sense of familiarity with my appendages. In war zones, I would

learn about another feeling, one I have yet to define but seems the opposite of fear: that feeling is a sense of my aliveness. And somewhere between these two feelings resides a place I think of as courage. I now believe that without courage, a person never can attain that feeling of being vigorously alive. Or so it has seemed in my life.

### Understanding Fear

Other than in my dreams, the first time I came face-to-face with deep and penetrating fear was during a battle in northern Afghanistan. It was Thanksgiving Day, 2001 and I was following an opposition movement with my young translator, who went by the single name, Esmatullah. I called him Esmat, and I learned in the time we spent together of his moral courage, as I explored my own. After eight hours of tagging behind the mujahideen—waiting, moving forward, waiting, then finally moving forward again—an eerie quiet settled over the area, and a tactile tension seemed to suck oxygen from the air we were trying to breathe.

Esmat lagged behind me further and further, as he walked in a zigzag line, muttering to himself. This seemed an unlikely time for him to check out mentally, and I didn't want him to suffer, so I advised him that I did not pay him to risk his life. If he was not comfortable with the situation, he should go back. But he insisted I was his responsibility

and if anything should happen to me, then the burden would be on his soul. I explained that he was not ultimately accountable for my choices and that I took full responsibility for my decisions. I gave him a fresh business card, advised him to contact my boss if I was injured or killed, and told him where my money was hidden.

Within minutes, a loud and chaotic battle, as only I had seen in the movies, unfolded before our eyes. In the distance were explosions from rocket-propelled grenades. Colored tracers lit up the scene, and men scurried for cover in the flat, dusty landscape. Soon the high-pitched whiz of bullets resounded in my ears. I was barely able to focus my eyes ahead when my overworked brain registered the fact that armed men were running towards us. Instead of carrying their weapons pointing forward, they were slung on their shoulders, and a panic palpably consumed their faces. If the mujahideen were running away, I figured, things must be bad.

I knew I must take photographs, recognizing that I was witnessing an amazing scene. Trembling, I put my camera to my face but my muscles would not cooperate. My pictures were so blurry that I quickly gave up and ran behind the Afghan fighters. I had no training for war so I did what I'd seen Vic Morrow do on the television shows of my childhood. I ran low. And when I heard a mortar go off close by, I

plastered my body on the nearest mud wall and waited for the resounding explosion before I continued.

By the time we had reached the end of the village where we could safely get cover, each breath seared my lungs. I turned to Esmat in relief and said, "Oh my goodness, my feet are killing me!" In the gravest of terms, he said, "No Cheryl, you are killing you." I looked at him and couldn't help but laugh at this young man, who at that moment seemed larger than life.

That day taught me the meaning of fear, but I also learned something else as every cell in my body screamed with life. At that moment there was a sense that I was, as all of us are, the sum of each primordial organism that has endured through billions of years of evolution to become the complex units of cells known as a human being. My heart—the preserver of that life—was pounding so loudly in my chest that it echoed in my ears.

In silence, we trudged back to the frontlines, as I contemplated my epiphany: Though paradoxical, I realized then that we are no closer to life than at moments when we are so close to death. Our existence, so easily extinguished, and our death, are not so opposite as we might think.

In war, emotions and choices become exponentially multiplied. Esmat's decision to follow me despite the danger has always overwhelmed me with awe. We don't see that kind of raw courage in our day-to-day lives in the United States. It's rare that we are called upon to make those kinds of decisions of deep and final consequence. Yet he made the choice not only to risk his life to look after my safety, but also to carry the burden of my death if that should have happened to me. And this, coming from a young man half my age, from a culture foreign to mine, from someone I barely knew. The lesson Esmat taught me that day has humbled and haunted me ever since.

### **Bearing Witness in Battle**

It would be more than a year later when I would find myself in Iraq, covering the U.S.-led invasion as an embedded

journalist. The day, April 4, 2003, is indelibly stamped in my memory. Riding in an amphibious assault vehicle, I watched as young Marines loaded cartridges in M-16 rifles and fired off round after round while we took both artillery and gunfire in an ambush in Al Aziziyah, just south of Baghdad. The earth shook from the violence, and gunpowder filled our nostrils. I was numb from exhaustion, and my senses were reeling from the activity.

Soon, confusion began to grip the Marines in my group. I gleaned that a civilian had gotten caught in the crossfire, and he was injured and trapped in his burning minivan. I knew that the chances of the vehicle exploding made helping him extremely treacherous. But he was very close to our vehicle, and a couple of the men felt compelled to jump out.

It was a moment of reckoning for me. Would I stay inside the safety of our armored cocoon or should I get out and risk the battlefield and the burning vehicle to make a picture of what was happening? I was there to cover a war, I mentally prodded myself. There was no time to write down the pros and the cons of the situation, to consider the percentages of risk, to weigh life's deeper truths. In a fraction of a second, I determined that the situation was worthy of my life, so I rushed out behind the men.

My mind and my camera were in sync. Perhaps my previous exposure to battle violence falsely inoculated me from injury. I moved quickly and methodically to make images of Marines saving the life of an aged civilian Iraqi, even as some of their own had just been killed in battle. Within minutes of making pictures of the rescue, I photographed somber faces as a Marine sergeant was carried away on a cot.

Witnessing efforts like this makes it easier to find the strength to look past one's fears. Somehow, the Marines' sacrifice was multiplied by the conditions, and I felt compelled to look beyond myself to record them in their moment of bravery. Ultimately, I found that my courage had simply been a byproduct of a moment whose significance was greater than me.

### **Returning From War**

My greatest challenge with my war coverage has been at home, in the months after my last trip to Iraq, as I deal with the ongoing personal effects of my war experience. Two weeks after my return to the United States, on August 2, 2005, a dear man and a friend, New York freelance journalist Steven Vincent, was killed in Iraq. Steven and I lived in the same hotel and often shared meals and many heated political discussions. His death violated me; his death could so easily have been my own. It unhinged my sense of safety and well-being.

I search for the courage to not fall into a moat of helplessness, to draw up my inner fortitude against the violence. I search for forgiveness at those times when I do feel weak and victimized. Months of quiet and solitude have been my path to peace. Only the passage of time has replenished my creativity and will.

Courage, I've learned, means having the strength to recognize and accept our weaknesses. It means having the wherewithal to stay on course when we believe in something. Courage is pursuing our dreams, and it is doing what is right when it could cost us our lives.

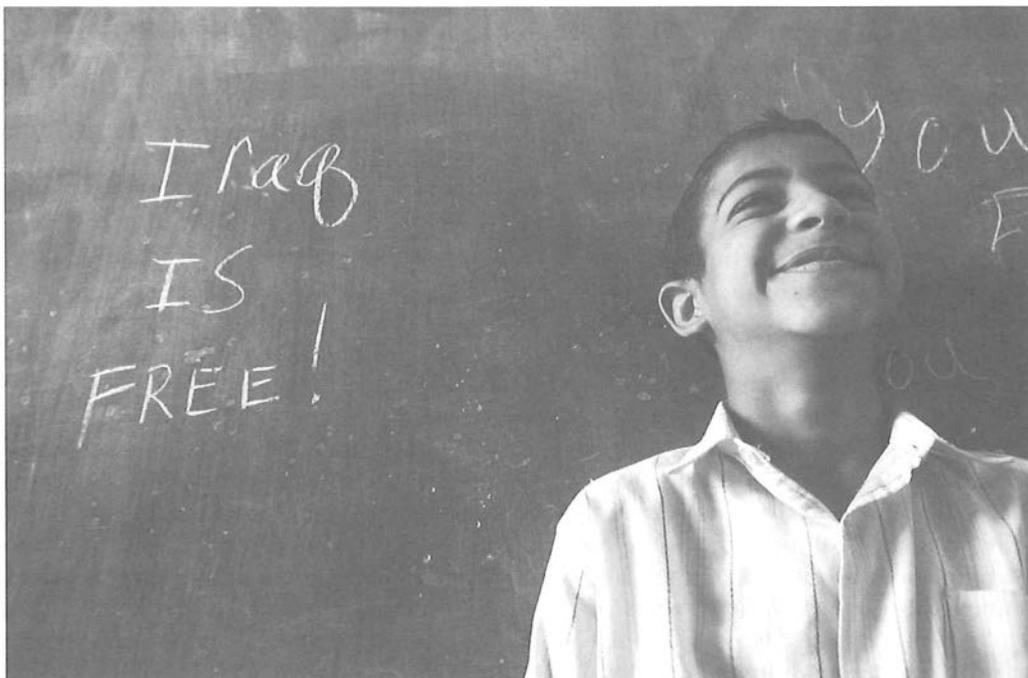
Courage is telling our mothers that we are going to cover a war and that we have chosen to go of our own volition. ■

Diaz Meyer's photos follow.

*Cheryl Diaz Meyer, a senior staff photographer for The Dallas Morning News, won the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news photography in 2004 with fellow staff photographer David Leeson for their images depicting the invasion and aftermath of the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Her work from Iraq, also awarded the Visa D'Or Daily Press Award 2003, is available in books, "Desert Diaries" and "The War in Iraq," published by Corbis and Life. For her Afghanistan coverage, she won the Overseas Press Club's John Faber Award.*

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Uniss Mohammad Salman, 10, returned to Al Amtithal Elementary School to a message on the chalkboard from U.S. military—"Iraq is free!" Al Amtithal was the first school to reopen in Baghdad. Of 1,200 pupils, only a handful of children returned. April 27, 2003.

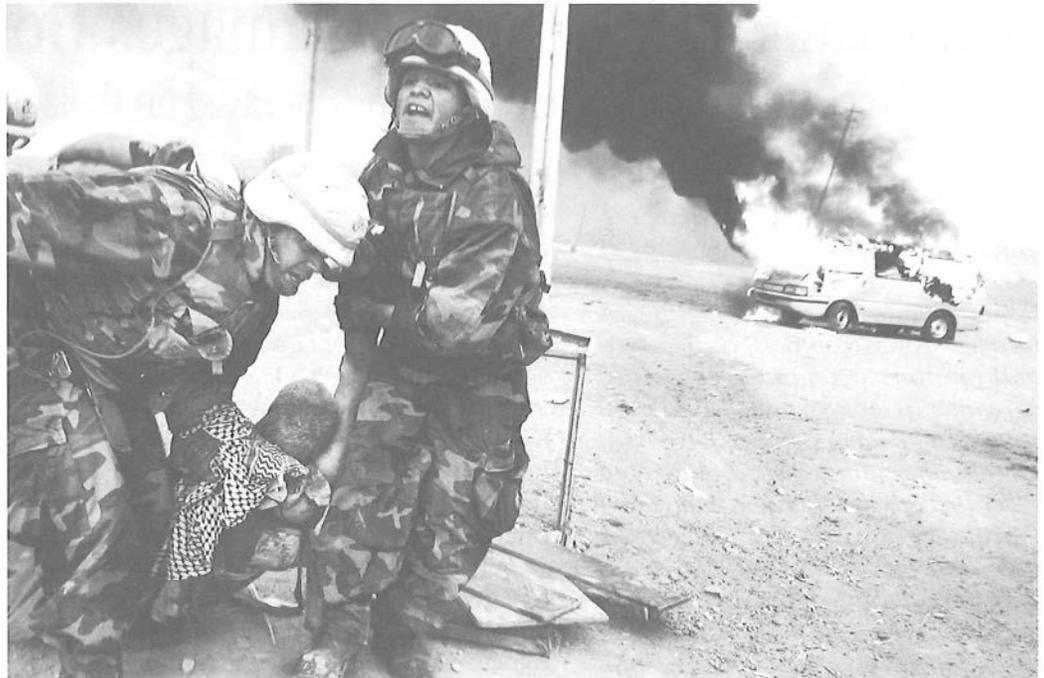


At Abu Ghraib Cemetery just outside of Baghdad, families from all over Iraq go to unearth the bones of their relatives who were tortured and killed by Saddam Hussein's regime. Mohammad Bakar Whathiq lovingly kisses the skull of his brother Brer Bakar Whathiq. Brer was arrested in October 1993 for opposing the regime. April 25, 2003.

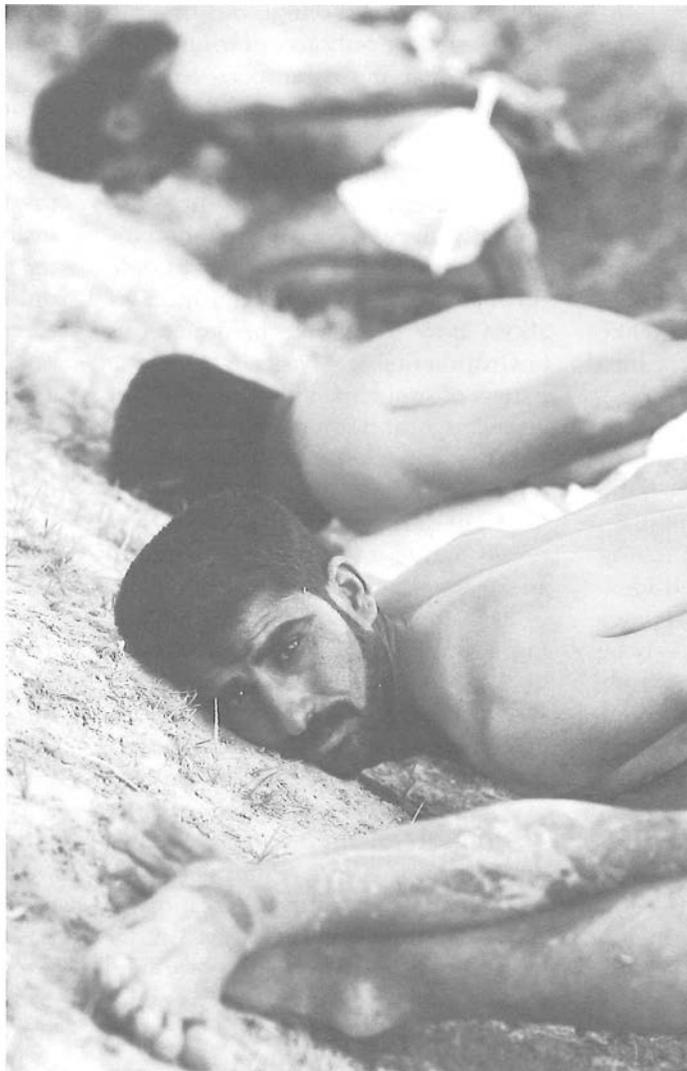


*Photos and captions by Cheryl Diaz Meyer/  
The Dallas Morning News.*

Lt. Jeffrey Goodman, left, and Lance Corporal Jorge Sanchez, right, drag a wounded civilian away from his burning vehicle during an advance on Baghdad by the Marine's Second Tank Battalion. The man was accidentally injured when he raced into the midst of an ambush. The fighting left four Marines dead and 17 injured. April 4, 2003.



After a short firefight in Sayyid Muhammad, a few kilometers northeast of Baghdad, suspects are rounded up, stripped and interrogated by the U.S. Marine Scouts of the Second Tank Battalion. April 9, 2003.



*Photos and captions by Cheryl Diaz Meyer/The Dallas Morning News.*

# Witnessing War to Send Its Images Home

‘What of our colleagues who have trauma engraved on their psyches?’

*Santiago Lyon, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, is the director of photography at The Associated Press, and therefore responsible for sending photographers into war zones, conflicts, civil unrest, and on other potentially dangerous assignments. At a Nieman Foundation conference held in October 2005, Lyon joined other journalists and trauma specialists to speak about how what journalists experience can affect their lives and health. The primary focus of his presentation was on the ethics of assigning journalists to cover war, crisis and disaster. An adapted version of what he said that day follows.*

Being the director of photography at The Associated Press [AP] means I'm responsible for sending photographers into harm's way. Having been a photojournalist for 20 years, and having covered not a few such stories myself, I bring to my work a dual perspective: I've been on the frontlines and returned home, and now I am the one who must make decisions about sending others into places of chaos and danger.

Fresh-faced photographers, keen to go to war, come to my office almost every month wanting to go off to the next nasty conflict, disaster or famine. I do my best to put them off, telling them it's really not a very good idea. The keenest ones insist and sometimes they go. I know they will not likely be the same after they've seen what they will see, but they are adults. They make choices, and the world needs to see what their images might help them to see.

I also talk with the veteran journalists, repeat visitors to horrible places, who are resilient, strong and determined, but vulnerable, too. One of those veterans, a colleague and a friend, asked me in a private moment whether it is okay to stop going to these stories. "Of course," I told him. "Our health is

all we have and that includes our mental health." Then I said to him, "When it gets to be too much, stop. Don't be shy. Be as decisive walking away as you were walking in." But I've watched, too, as some veterans, who haven't walked away, crumble. Sometimes I see their marriages fall apart. Their children become strangers to them. Knowing they're in pain, I reach out and try to offer assistance.

My responsibility to the brave individuals I assign is continuous and unwavering, before, during and after they've done their stories. It cannot be anything but that. Nobody is ever obliged to cover a dangerous or a difficult story. We only accept volunteers. But not just any volunteers. Nobody is allowed anywhere near a dangerous story for the AP unless they've been through what's called "Hostile Environment" training, which are typically five-day courses that many news organizations put their people through, where they learn a little bit about how to survive in dangerous environments. It's basically a combination of some first aid, some military knowledge, and some common sense. For the experienced professional it often reinforces things learned in the field. For the first-time visitor to stories of this nature it is an extremely useful and eye-opening course.

Participants also learn about taking care of themselves, what they're likely to encounter, and what effect those things might have on them. It is extremely difficult to witness death, destruction and other turmoil without being affected by it. Some people, though, are naturally resilient and bounce back better; some get stuck on a particularly disturbing memory or series of memories that affects other behavior. On occasion photographers feel wounded by what they have seen. The word trauma, after all, comes to us from the Greek "wound."

Some call me for help or their friends and colleagues are quick to alert me if they suspect something is wrong, since they know that I know what this is all about. I speak the language of experience and can often sense the degree of pain, but at much of what is involved in dealing with trauma and its effects, I'm an amateur, albeit a well-intentioned one, concerned about the issues involved with trauma and how it affects those who cover war and other tragic situations.

## Ethics of Assignments

The ethics of assignments are sometimes troubling. In the November 2004 U.S.-led offensive of Fallujah in Iraq we had a young Iraqi photographer, a resident of the town, inside the city with a digital camera and a satellite phone. He wanted to stay and cover the offensive from inside the city, and I wanted him out, for his own safety. He insisted, and so did I. In the end, he stayed. I was very clear. I sent him a message saying, "Your safety is paramount. I don't want to see any photos, unless you're comfortable and safe in sending them."

The offensive began. I dreaded that my phone would ring with bad news. Instead his amazing images trickled out, and then silence, and then more dread. Finally, with his house destroyed, he went into hiding and eventually squeezed out of Fallujah and went back to Baghdad. One of his images went on to be part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning package.

The quandary I faced in this case is something I find quite difficult. A photographer who wants to show the world what is happening assumes the risk, forcefully and willingly. He was a freelancer, not bound to the AP by contract. Short of refusing his images, what could we do? But what if he had been a Western employee? I could oblige him or her to leave or threaten dire conse-

quences if they didn't—a scenario that has occurred in the past when some news organizations ordered their U.S. staff out of Baghdad prior to the U.S. invasion. (Some of the U.S. journalists ordered out by their employers found ways to “miss the bus” until it was too late, and they had to stay.)

It's clear and obvious, however, that no story is worth a life. The Freedom Forum Journalists Memorial carries the names of hundreds of journalists who have perished over the years doing their job. A dozen of my colleagues, including a few close friends, have their names inscribed there, and they shall not be forgotten. But it's clear that dead journalists can tell no stories.

For those of us still here, war, trauma, disaster and human suffering are unfortunately an integral part of our profession, and aside from trying to actively keep people out of life-threatening situations and minimizing the risks, what of the survivors? What of our colleagues who have trauma engraved on their psyches? In one case, I asked that the journalist be assessed psychiatrically, and he passed the test and carries on.

Increased demand for news content and the easy-to-use technology to deliver it means that more and more inexperienced, young journalists are turning up at large stories. Some of

them, as always, are hoping to make their names professionally, going where no one else will go in search of compelling images or a story. Some are just hoping to make some money or looking for the adrenaline thrill that often comes with covering violence. Many, of course, are genuinely concerned, hoping to give voice to the voiceless, or any combination of all of those things.

That mix of characters on a news story is nothing new. What is new is a better understanding of the effects that covering those stories can have on people. Research shows that almost 30 percent of journalists repeatedly exposed to traumatic situations develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) over their lifetimes. That's almost one in three who continue to cover these stories. That's a very high percentage, in my view.

And the questions are many. When, for example, does the intimacy of someone's mental health become an employer's concern? Especially if they're resilient, as they often are, continue to plow forward, ignoring or hiding PTSD symptoms, fearful that they will be taken away from what are often highly compelling, not to mention disturbing, experiences in the field? Churchill was probably right when he said that “Nothing in life is

so exhilarating as to be shot at with no result.”

Are the employee assistance programs offered by media companies complete and thorough enough? Depending on the individuals and their circumstances, counseling might have to stretch for months, if not years. Do employers understand that? Are they willing to fund long-term investment in keeping their people healthy? Do the counselors or psychiatrists offered by employee assistance programs or media organizations really understand the issues at hand? Are they up-to-date with the new research and investigation on the effects of trauma? Are they trauma specialists? Do they understand the nature of journalism as it relates to covering stories of this nature? We're not, after all, bankers, or lawyers, or businessmen whose contact with trauma and violence, while often very direct, is usually involuntary.

Journalists want to see and communicate the truth. It is their mission and ours and, to fulfill it, these photographers must often deliberately expose themselves to terrible things, unforgettable things that can haunt them, and often do, for the rest of their lives. We have a collective responsibility to provide what assistance we can, and that responsibility is thankfully starting to be recognized. ■

## When Bearing Witness Overrides a Reporter's Fear

‘... courage is not me, a clunky reporter clutching a notebook and treading on people's lives, trying to get them to open up their souls.’

By Janine di Giovanni

The novelist Adam Thorpe, writing in *The Guardian* (U.K.) newspaper, recently reviewed my book, “The Place at the End of the World: Stories From the Frontline.” It was a very good review but, as always, when one reads something written about oneself, there are interesting revelations, to say the least.

“War is di Giovanni's staple subject,”

he writes. “She's covered it in places such as Rwanda, Iraq, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Chechnya and Afghanistan. She's not quite sure how she's survived, and neither are we.” That part made me laugh. I'm afraid it is true.

Later Thorpe writes that in my 18-year career, I have gone to “suicidal lengths” to bear witness to human rights abuse around the world and

to bring back the stories of the “small voices.” He describes me as “stubbornly brave.” I like reading these words, but they embarrass me, too. Stubborn I am, fiercely and annoyingly so. But brave is not something I would call myself.

As a child I was afraid of the dark. I still hold an irrational horror for jungle creatures: spiders, insects, large things with wings. I sometimes sleep with the

bathroom light on if I am alone and get up at least five times to make sure all the doors are locked and the windows barred. And once, in a guesthouse in Liberia during the civil war, I was so frightened of what lay outside my door that I barricaded the room with chairs and drugged myself to sleep with a codeine painkiller that a United Nations doctor had slipped me in case of gunshot wounds.

Some of the places that I have been have been very frightening. There are things I will never forget. The early, frozen dawn of a Grozny suburb after Russian forces had taken the city, when I huddled in a potato cellar with an old woman listening to the bombardment and sure I would be dead by daylight. Watching an Ivorian soldier slowly raise his gun to my chest after I screamed at him to let me take a wounded man to the hospital in my taxi during the first day of the coup d'état. The sound of rapid gunfire over a bush

in Sierra Leone, where a few seconds before there had been stillness. Then the rush of chaos. My car being surrounded by teenage, drugged soldiers in Freetown who waved RPG's and demanded that I get out so they could rape me. The terrible hollow sound of a bomb being dropped near my base camp in Kosovo and the screams of pain from the people that it hit.

I have been terribly frightened at times, but innermost in my mind was that I would always survive. Why, I am not sure, but I believe it probably has something to do with faith. A friend of mine, a former combat photographer once said, "I never think I will get hurt because my mother loves me too much." It sounds ridiculous, but

everyone has their own reason as to why the bullet that hits the guy next to you won't hit you.

I believe the work that I have done over the years is important, and I am proud when I get a letter from an ordinary person, someone in Middle America or Middle England, a housewife or a teacher or a radio technician, who writes and says, "Thank you for



A father's hands press against the window of a bus carrying his tearful son and wife to safety from the besieged city of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War in November 1992.

*Photo by Laurent Rebours/Courtesy of The Associated Press.*

your compassion."

But I don't think of myself as courageous. Because courage is meant for the people I leave behind—the civilians who could not cross the frontlines of Sarajevo to leave the debilitating medieval siege. The young boy in Mogadishu who helped me find my way through the maze of clan warfare and who told me how one day, walking down the street with his brother, he heard the whiz of a bullet, then found his brother dead on the ground next to him. Or even that old woman in the potato cellar in Grozny, who got up from the cellar at one point to make us tea on a camp stove.

I went to lots of terrible places. I got marched in the woods by Serb paramili-

taries with a gun pointed at my back. I got stuck in dangerous places in Africa. I slept a terrible sleep on a door frame in East Timor and waited for an assault from rebels with machetes. But eventually—and sometimes it took weeks and even months—I got out, I went home, I took a hot shower, I ate a good meal. I went to the cinema, I slept in a real bed with clean sheets. The people

who befriended me, who shared their rice, who made me laugh, who helped me find water to wash, did not. They stayed behind.

That is always the guilt of the reporter who covers conflict. You survive, someone else does not. And why? And why is it that I was born in a comfortable suburban American hospital and had good shoes and music lessons, and someone else was born in Srebrenica

and was of fighting age in 1995, so therefore is probably dead? These are the things I think about when I go to sleep at night, and because of that I do know that I have something that is known as compassion.

But courage is reserved for other people.

Courage was my father bravely and doggedly fighting cancer, saying right up until the very end, "I'm not going to let cancer kill me!" And trying to be brave so that we would not falter.

Courage is Lotti Latrous, a wealthy Swiss woman who gave up her entire life, including her family, to sleep on the floor of a hut and nurse Ivorians dying of AIDS who had been left to die in the street.

Courage is Felicia Langer, an Israeli Jewish woman who inspired me to do the work I do now, who for many years was one of the few Jewish lawyers defending Palestinians in military court. The cost she paid to defend the enemy was being constantly worried about her own personal security.

Courage is the Kosovar Serbs who hid Kosovar Albanians in their homes during the NATO bombing in 1999.

Courage is the mothers of Srebrenica who saw their menfolk walk into the forest in July 1995 to defend their town against a brutal onslaught—and never return.

Was it Hemingway who described courage as grace under pressure? I am not sure. But when I think of that, courage is not me, a clunky reporter clutching a notebook and treading on people's lives, trying to get them to open up their souls.

Grace under pressure is Gordana Knezevic, a Bosnian of Serb origin who managed not only to bring out a newspaper every day of the siege—the embattled and wonderful Sarajevo

daily *Oslobodjenje*—but to raise her children in the back room of her house because it was farther from the street and thus safer from errant shrapnel or snipers' bullets.

Courage is my old interpreter Mona in Baghdad, who stuck by my side through the darkest days of the Saddam times and during and after the invasion.

Courage is the man who drove through Russian tanks to bring me out of Grozny after he heard my newspaper reports aired on Russian television, and he knew that if Russian soldiers found me, they would probably kill me.

Courage is all of these people and a million more who are embedded forever in my notebooks. Ordinary people. The bravest souls are the ones who keep families together during war, who manage to continue their lives without going mad.

No, a reporter's role is to bear witness. And if we have the ability to do so—the financial backing of a paper or a TV company, the guts and the vision—then we have an obligation

more than anything. Martha Gellhorn once wrote about loving only one war, and the rest being duty. I still feel like that—Bosnia was the war that took and broke my heart in a million little pieces. But Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the rest of the world, the places I will go and bring back a story that I hope someone will read, and then go to bed that night thinking: "Thank God I don't live in Mogadishu" and gain some kind of insight, some kind of compassion—that to me is my responsibility. ■

*Janine di Giovanni is the author of "Madness Visible: A Memoir of War," published by Knopf and "The Place at the End of the World: Stories From the Frontline," published by Bloomsbury in the United Kingdom. She has reported on numerous wars and conflicts and has won two Amnesty International awards, the National Magazine Award, and been named Britain's Foreign Correspondent of the Year. Her Web site is [www.janinedigiovanni.com](http://www.janinedigiovanni.com)*

## The Survival Mode of Reporting From a War Zone

'Our generation is more vocal about trauma we experience than others have been. It can't be avoided when you see this much violence and senseless death.'

*Farnaz Fassibi directed The Wall Street Journal's Baghdad bureau from 2003 until December 2005. She then became the newspaper's senior Middle East correspondent, covering Iran and other Arab countries. She spoke in May with Nieman Reports editor, Melissa Ludtke, from New York City.*

**Melissa Ludtke:** What does it feel like not only to work but also to live in an environment in which your life is threatened—to never escape from the threat of some harm or danger? You describe a car bomb that went off near a house you had recently left and several foreigners abducted and beheaded in the neighborhood. Another

time a car bomb exploded outside of the house you were living in, and yet you had to stay there knowing that insurgents were outside and might possibly abduct you. It is as though you can't escape from it.

**Farnaz Fassibi:** I think in those circumstances, when you live and work in Iraq, you go into a survival mode in which you push the fears out of your mind and just do what you have to do. It's only when you leave that environment that your body and mind can truly process the trauma you've experienced. I think that is why so many of us are experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder; we can function when

we are there almost mechanically, but it hits us when we leave.

**Ludtke:** Is there a way you can describe what this survival mode feels like? It sounds to me like it is more the absence of feeling than it is its presence.

**Fassibi:** I think it is almost automatic; it's not something you think about doing. It is something that happens to you. You never really rest or have deep sleep at night. You are always vigilant for sounds and movement and on full alert.

**Ludtke:** Your family had fears for your safety. Your only sibling, your sister,

## When Risks Make a Story Too Dangerous to Tell

*On January 26, 2006, a few days after freelance reporter Jill Carroll was kidnapped in Iraq, Los Angeles Times correspondent Alissa J. Rubin wrote a Page One story entitled, "Abduction Forces a Grim Look at What a Story Is Worth." In her article she described how the kidnapping of a fellow journalist had compelled her to "reevaluate limits and responsibilities." At the conclusion of her article, which we excerpt below, Rubin wrote about assessing the risks she was taking in doing a story and the responsibility she felt to the Iraqi translator and driver who were accompanying her.*

Last week I set out in the early morning for Kut, a city about two hours south of Baghdad. We left early so that we could get back in a day, adhering to the rule that you shouldn't stay long in a single place because word will get around that a Westerner is in town.

I roused one of our British security advisors at 7 a.m. and had him remind the drivers of protocol (keep the cars apart, don't look like a convoy, rely on radios to communicate). But when I went out, it turned out the driver had brought his own vehicle, not an armored car.

Carroll's experience hung in my mind. She had been abducted in part because she lacked the protection of an armored car, and her interpreter had been shot dead. I looked at my interpreter, a beautiful young Iraqi woman

who loved to read English literature, had helped me buy Iraqi shoes so that I would appear more local, and had taught me about the world of Iraqi women. But I pushed ahead.

Then it turned out we didn't have a Thuraya satellite phone in the car. Cell phones are notoriously unreliable in Iraq because the U.S. military often blocks signals during its operations. Traveling without a satellite telephone as a backup is at best foolhardy. But we had already left, so I resigned myself to traveling without it.

We weaved through the Baghdad traffic. The road was crowded, and people could easily see us through the car windows. Although I usually look out at the passing scene, I forced myself to look into the car so that my eyes and skin would not be visible.

The most dangerous part of the trip is the 15 miles of road immediately south of Baghdad proper. It runs through a largely Sunni farming area, one where mutilated, headless bodies have turned up often. It feels like outlaw country: Someone could grab you and no one would say anything.

As we went through the last Baghdad checkpoint, a policeman told our driver that a new security plan was in effect, and we would not be able to reenter the capital for 48 hours. The driver pulled over and turned to me: Did I still want to go?

when she got engaged asked you for one gift: to stop going back to Iraq so that you would be alive when she got married. How did those feelings/fears affect you and your work in Iraq?

**Fassihi:** Other people's fears about you are never far from your mind. For me, it has meant just being a lot more careful. My sister was getting married, and my mother was very agonized about my Iraq assignment. When I had to make a decision about a reporting trip, I'd ask myself whether I really need to go on this interview, whether it was worth the potential risk of getting kidnapped, killed or injured. Sometimes I decided against going and would send one of the Iraqi staffers at our bureau.

**Ludtke:** You have said that working in such a dangerous place led to you forming "intense friendships" with

other journalists—and described how you would monitor each other for security. Do you think the intensity of these friendships gave each of you the ability to be more courageous in the work you were expected to do?

**Fassihi:** The conditions in Iraq were so extreme that it created a parallel reality to the outside world we knew. So having friends does help keep you sane. We looked after one another. We would count on each other for support and check on one another several times a day. Whenever I would leave to go somewhere—whether it was out on a story, or to do an interview, or to go out to buy a loaf of bread—there were two or three other journalists I would call to let them know where I was going. I'd tell them exactly what streets I'd be taking, where the interview was taking place, and when I expected to

be back. And if I wasn't back within a half an hour of when I said I'd be back, they were to let my editors know. And also we could talk to each other in ways no one else could; there is a sense that no one else other than your colleagues and friends on the ground really get what you have been through.

**Ludtke:** After you were confronted by angry mobs and were fired upon or your car was chased, I am wondering how you prepared yourself to go out and report again after having that kind of concrete experience with danger.

**Fassihi:** It slows you down for maybe a day or two, but then you go back out because that is what you need to do. I was in a helicopter one time with some military troops and we just about crashed, but I went back in helicopters after that happened. But the feelings

It was a moment of truth. I had to get back that night. Was there any other way I could get into Baghdad if the roads were closed? Yes, my driver said. “You can walk across the Diyala Bridge, and the office can send a car to meet you.”

He nodded to a stream of people who were doing that right then—women in swirling abayas picking their way through the mud, men striding along. “How far would I have to walk?” I asked. About a mile. “Is it safe?” The driver shook his head. “There are bad people here. Everyone can see you when you are walking. We cannot honestly tell you it is safe.”

### ‘We Can’t Go’

I appealed to my interpreter. “What do you think, Zainab? Is it that unsafe?” She turned and looked at me. “I’ll go with you if that’s what you decide to do, but the driver wants to know what he can do with his car. He can’t leave it outside Baghdad on the road for the night. It would be stolen. He can’t stay with it—it’s dangerous. And then we have the chase car. What do you want them to do?”

I was silent. I had come back to Iraq to do a small number of interviews. If I didn’t go to the one in Kut, I wouldn’t be able to finish the story.

I thought about close calls I had had in the past. About

my interpreter, who said she would go with me no matter what. About my parents, who hated that I was in Iraq. About Carroll, whom I imagined alone in a room, perhaps cold, perhaps not knowing that thousands of people were thinking about her.

And I thought about an autumn night more than a year ago when a colleague had rushed off into western Iraq to cover a suicide bombing. I remembered how worried I had been, and when I finally reached him on the satellite phone I had said: “It’s not about us. We can die if we want to here, but we can’t put those who work for us in more danger than they already are. We’re making decisions for more than ourselves.”

I remember that he had listened and, hard as it must have been, said, “You’re right, I’m coming back.”

I heard my own words now in my head. There was no choice. “We can’t go. There’s no way to make it a safe trip,” I said. “Let’s turn around and go back to the office.”

Was it the right decision? Could I have walked across the bridge unnoticed? Did the drivers really assess the danger correctly? I don’t know. But what I do know is that Iraq is hostile ground and nothing I do can make it safe. ■

hit me not on other military helicopter rides but when I was flying in commercial airlines outside of Iraq. We hit any turbulence, and I would freak out; the memories and fear would come back. I have to say, for me, the feelings are most intense when I’m outside of Iraq and have a chance to reflect and process my experiences.

**Ludtke:** You said there were times when you put parts of a story in the hands of Iraqis who were working with you at the bureau. But were there also times when you thought that the story was not worth the risks it was demanding of you or of your Iraqi staffers to tell?

**Fassihi:** I never thought the story as a whole was not worth the risks. I firmly believe that war correspondents have a mission. They are the only independent

observers of conflict, and if journalists were not there to tell this difficult story, then people would have to rely on only what the military and government of-

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**Being there to tell the story was important and was worth the risks. But I came to realize that after three years of being in Iraq ... I needed to leave.**

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officials want us to know. Being there to tell the story was important and was worth the risks. But I came to realize that after three years of being in Iraq and working under these conditions

I needed to leave. At the same time I argued strenuously that there had to be another reporter sent to Baghdad and that the bureau we have there had to remain open.

**Ludtke:** By the fall of 2004, insurgents in Iraq were abducting foreigners from their homes in Baghdad. By then, you had hired armed guards and were traveling in a fully armored car and limiting the reporting trips you made outside of protective zones. And you were relying on Iraqis who worked in your bureau to be your eyes and ears in Baghdad—though they would sometimes bring people to your hotel office for you to meet and interview. And for stories outside of Baghdad you only traveled as an embedded reporter, with the U.S. military or State Department as escorts. How did these changed circumstances—based on a

situation where violence exists around you—affect the reporting your paper could do and the stories that were important to tell?

**Fassihi:** Our inability to move around freely or to travel to parts of the country made this very, very difficult. And to have to use Iraqis to do some of our interviews, sometimes they were not able to pick up on subtle things that we might feel are important to the story, or might not observe things in the same way we'd want to if we had been able to go out to do the story. But we tried to be creative and find ways around the challenges and, I have to say, under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances, I think we've all done our best.

**Ludtke:** You—and other Western correspondents—speak about the commitment and courage displayed by the Iraqi staffers who took on increasingly risky assignments to them and their family members as the violence in Iraq increased. In one of your articles you quote one of your drivers as saying, "We live like animals in the wild. We eat, we sleep, and we try not to get killed each day." Can you talk a bit about what those Iraqis who worked with you risked by doing the kind of work your news organization and others began to rely on them to do?

**Fassihi:** They foremost risk their lives. They risk being kidnapped or killed, or having family members kidnapped. They never carry with them an identification that would show that they work for us, and no one other than their spouse knows what they do. They would not tell their children in fear that they might say something to someone. And Iraqis who have worked for Western news organizations have been killed, and they've had family members threatened.

**Ludtke:** Where do you think they find this kind of internal strength to do this kind of work? Have you talked with them about this?

**Fassihi:** I did talk with them about this. I think journalism is addictive; for them, it enables them to help to tell their country's story to the world, and this gives them a powerful sense that they are doing something useful and

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important at a time when their country is being torn to pieces.

**Ludtke:** You have written that "being a woman correspondent in an Arab Muslim culture proved to be a huge asset," and that your Iranian-American identity also became very useful in your work, as you could wear and shed your heritage and upbringing depending on the situation. Because of this, do you think that this enabled you to take risks in your reporting that other Western reporters might not feel they are able to take?

**Fassihi:** Yes, I think it did. I think looking like a local and being able to hide under those garments made me more invisible. This made it easier for me to blend in than it would be for someone who had blond hair and blue eyes and therefore might be a more visible target than I would be.

**Ludtke:** Alissa Rubin with the Los Angeles Times wrote an article in January, soon after Jill Carroll was kidnapped,

about an assignment she set out on with her Iraqi translator and driver. [See box on page 64 for an excerpt from her article.] It called for her to travel outside of Baghdad to do an interview. At each step along the way, she became more concerned about the risks she might be taking for herself and those who were traveling with her, but she continued to press on. Finally at the last roadblock they were told that

they could not return for 48 hours, which meant staying in a very dangerous place, when they had intended to be back in Baghdad that same evening. At that point, she felt that because of the lives of her companions whom she was responsible for she could not

go any further and turned around and returned to Baghdad. Have you had a similar moment when you've had circumstances add up to a decision that the risk is just too large for you to go on?

**Fassihi:** Yes, I remember during the seizure of the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, I went down there with another journalist. We didn't take armored cars because we wanted to blend in with the locals and we hid our flak jackets and satellite phones and I wore a black, long abaya all the way. About a mile or so near Najaf, we reached a blockade that we could not pass. The cops had closed the road, and they were engaged in a shootout with some people who looked like militia running around open fields along the road. We quickly turned around and had to make a choice: Do we wait for the shooting to stop, do we take the back way through the village, or simply return to the next nearest city? We chose the last option, which was the safest, and ended up spending a night

in Karbala. But a trip that should have taken us only a few hours turned into taking us two days. Constantly, we were evaluating risks like these every step of the way and having to make decisions on whether to go ahead in reporting what we set out to report or turn around and go back to where it would be safer for us.

**Ludtke:** Now that you are out of Iraq, and you spoke earlier about the trauma

that returns to you from these times, what have you learned about courage in the practice of journalism in a situation like the coverage of war in Iraq?

**Fassihi:** Courage comes out of the commitment to telling the story, a belief that this is what we must do and the importance of doing it. Bearing witness to conflict and the impact it has on ordinary lives is not easy, and the chance to relay it to the world is

a huge responsibility. I think our generation of war correspondents is more vocal about trauma we experience than others have been. It can't be avoided when you see this much violence and senseless death. And it's something that is going to be with us, likely with all of us, when we leave Iraq. I still jump when I hear loud sounds like a door slamming or thunder. I can't watch fireworks; they remind me too much of mortars. ■

## Teamwork Replaces Ego on the Frontlines of War

'Reckless correspondents endanger not just themselves but everyone in the close-knit teams that operate in Iraq.'

By Barry Moody

**H**eroism under fire was long the stuff of barroom legend, not just for soldiers but also for war correspondents.

Many journalists revelled in a reputation for careless courage in the adrenaline rush to get the story first. Reporters built reputations on their apparent lack of fear when shells and bullets were flying. On a few occasions, photojournalists were so intent on the image in the lens that they recorded their own deaths, catching the swinging tank gun turret or a soldier aiming his rifle, just before they were hit.

I remember being told one of those barroom legends about the veteran British war correspondent Noel Barber, who was badly wounded during the Hungarian Rising in 1956. According to the probably apocryphal account, an arch rival is said to have received a telegram from his editor after Barber's gripping story was splashed saying:

"Barber of Daily Mail shot, how about you?"

The bravery still exists, of course, and has even grown in the face of an exponential increase in the dangers facing journalists, particularly in Iraq, where death can come from any direc-

tion they also risk their lives every day just to reach their workplace.

But the age of disregarding the danger for the sake of a story has long gone. It belongs to a more romantic era that was finally ended by the Iraq War. We have all become more keenly aware of

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**It is an object of daily sadness for me that this, the bloodiest period in Reuters 155-year history, occurred during my watch as editor for the Middle East and Africa. ... I would be lying if I did not admit to losing plenty of sleep after authorizing reporting trips to war zones, even after carefully assessing the risks and concluding that they were acceptable.**

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the enormous risks for modern correspondents, risks that leave no space for bravado. More than 70 Iraqi and foreign journalists have been killed in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003. Add in media support workers, and the number is a horrifying 100 or more.

tion at any time in a country bathed in endemic, almost casual violence.

The bravest journalists I know, by a long shot, are the Palestinian crews or the incredible team of Iraqis working for Reuters. They don't just do the lion's share of covering a conflict where easily identified Westerners can report only in tightly restricted conditions,

Iraq is so deadly because death comes from either side of the "frontline" in the fog of this war. All our casualties were killed by U.S. action, while many more journalists have died at the hands of the insurgents.

Reuters has suffered particularly grievously in this deadly new century. We lost eight of our journalists in the last six years, since Kurt Schork died

in Sierra Leone. Four of them, all from television, were killed in Iraq. It is an object of daily sadness for me that this, the bloodiest period in Reuters 155-year history, occurred during my watch as editor for the Middle East and Africa.

This new era of journalism places extra strains on editors. I would be lying if I did not admit to losing plenty of sleep after authorizing reporting trips to war zones, even after carefully assessing the risks and concluding that they were acceptable. For despite the danger, we remain absolutely committed to maintaining coverage and making sure it is as balanced as the rest of our reporting. That means covering both sides of a conflict and brings with it regular, difficult decisions on deployments.

The military in America and Britain tell you that the only way to reduce the risks is to embed journalists so they get the best protection and are not mistaken for the enemy. It is hard to convince many officers that embedding tells only one side of the story, and we must have both sides to ensure our essential independence.

During many years running Reuters coverage from this part of the world, I saw very clearly how attitudes to war reporting have changed. When we

made hostile environment training compulsory at the start of the decade, some of our most experienced war correspondents raised a cynical eyebrow at the idea they could be taught anything. After careful training by former soldiers, they have universally changed their minds. Several have told me their lives were saved by the training. The best war correspondents are the ones who meticulously plan their assignments, make sure they have the best equipment, and do everything possible to minimize the risks.

These days the old gung-ho spirit seems to exist only among a few novices eager to earn their spurs and unaware of just how dangerous it is. As often as not that is a good reason to reject them. Reckless correspondents endanger not just themselves but everyone in the close-knit teams that operate in Iraq. Several translators, guards and drivers have been killed during kidnappings of Westerners. We have made it abundantly clear that anyone who breaks the rules on how to behave in Iraq will be withdrawn immediately.

Teamwork is the one thing that has grown during the Iraq conflict. Everybody covers for their colleagues, and correspondents who bring a big ego to Baghdad will not be invited back. In the fortified bunkers where corre-

spondents hunker down in Baghdad, everybody lives cheek by jowl both in and out of work. Characters who do not fit in will undermine the mental as well as physical welfare of their colleagues.

So what is courage in this new journalistic world? It is certainly not running towards the guns with camera or notebook in hand. We have drummed into our journalists the mantra that no story is worth a life. They all know it and share it. But courage these days still exists in abundance. You need it just to take the plane to Baghdad and drive into the city gazing watchfully out of the car windows along the dangerous airport road.

The modern combat journalist is still often a person of huge personal bravery. But these days bravery has to be tempered by great amounts of good sense, preparation and training. And above all leave the ego and bravado behind. ■

*Barry Moody, a long-time Reuters journalist, was editor for the Middle East and Africa for seven years before recently moving to Nairobi to oversee a campaign to boost the coverage from the African continent.*

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## Transforming Anger at Journalists' Deaths Into Action

The International News Safety Institute provides training and support for journalists whose work puts them in danger.

By Rodney Pinder

Recently I read an op-ed by a journalism teacher that made me mad. Under the headline "The glamour of the frontline," this sage set out to expose the "dirty little secret in journalism" that conflict reporting was glamorous and fun and a great

way to get ahead. Those who did it by and large were a bunch of thrill-seeking egoists who, the writer implied, had only themselves to blame if they became casualties of war.

Tell that to the many unsung heroes of the war's coverage in Iraq—local

reporters, photographers, cameramen, fixers and others who provide most of the news we read and see from their ravaged country. Two-thirds of the 123 news media staff who have given their lives to cover this war were Iraqi, according to the figures compiled by

## Seeking Support for News Media Safety From the United Nations

INSI has joined the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the European Broadcasting Union in pushing for a United Nations Security Council resolution on news media safety. This move was prompted by a U.N. resolution on the safety of humanitarian workers in conflict, yet more than three times as many news media staff are killed in warfare. A draft was presented at the World Electronic Media Forum to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who expressed sympathy. "The United Nations ... defends your right, as journalists, to be free from physical intimidation and harm," he said. "I will continue to press governments to uphold their responsibility both to create conditions in which journalists can do their job safely and to bring to justice those who commit crimes against them."

Subsequently we were advised that it was unlikely the Security Council would pass such a resolution. It was then reduced to a clause to be included in a proposed resolution on the safety

of civilians in conflict and read:

"Recognizing the critical importance of freedom of information and expression, noting Article 79 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions which states that journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians, concerned by increasing evidence of acts of violence and, in particular, deliberate attacks against journalists and media staff and associated personnel, urges States to ensure that crimes against journalists, media staff and associated personnel, when perpetrated to prevent the exercise of freedom of information and expression, are properly investigated and do not remain unpunished, and requests the secretary-general to address in all his country-specific situation reports, the issue of the safety and security of journalists, media staff, and associated personnel including specific acts of violence, remedial actions taken and

actions taken to identify and hold accountable those who commit such acts, and to explore and propose additional ways and means to enhance the safety and security of such personnel."

Now we've been advised that even this small gesture might be too much for the Security Council to accept. But we press on, with support emerging from an unexpected quarter, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Ambeyi Ligabo, its special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, delivered an unequivocal defense of press freedom to the commission's 62nd session in Geneva in January. Citing INSI data on journalist deaths, Ligabo said the proposed resolution "is worth careful consideration." He declared that there is a need for international guidelines and rules that could be adopted by the General Assembly concerning the protection and security of journalists and other media staff. ■ —R.P.

the International News Safety Institute (INSI). Or tell journalists in Latin America who are dying, literally, to tell the story of the drug trade about the glamour of what they do. Or say this to independent broadcasters in the Philippines who seek merely to exercise their right to freedom of speech in an Asian democracy and are murdered by those they offend.

Thrill-seekers? Egomaniacs? Romantic fools? No. These people are just incredibly brave, ordinary men and women who believe that without freedom of expression there is no democracy and who are prepared to put their lives and livelihoods on the line to keep their countrymen and the rest of the world informed. International war reporters courageously face danger to

report what war is about, often paying the ultimate price; often we hear of them when danger wins. Yet most of the news media personnel who die on assignment throughout the world are workaday reporters who are covering

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**The bullet is a cheap, effective and relatively risk-free form of press censorship; it silences forever a troublesome reporter and intimidates colleagues, friends and family.**

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low-level conflict and disorder, corruption and crime in their own countries. More than 1,300 such journalists have died violently over the past 15 years; last year was the worst on record, with

146 recorded deaths.

Outside of Iraq, the Philippines was the most dangerous place to be a journalist last year, with 10 murdered. Other places with multiple deaths were Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Colombia, Haiti, Brazil, Afghanistan and Mexico. Most of the victims were targeted because of their work, and they were shot, blown up, stabbed and/or beaten to death. Over the years, drug traffickers in Latin America have exacted a terrible toll on journalists trying to expose their activities. Corrupt police and other authorities let them get away

with it.

The bullet is a cheap, effective and relatively risk-free form of press censorship; it silences forever a troublesome reporter and intimidates colleagues,

friends and family. Around the world, something like 90 percent of killers of journalists get away with it. At best, the authorities do not seem to care very much. At worst, they collude because they don't like prying journalists, either.

Anger and concern over the rising death toll prompted some in the global news industry finally to act. We were tired of the usual journalist reaction of getting mad and sounding off and then moving on. We felt we had to do something effective, and no one else—no government, no politician, no army—was going to do it for us.

### Acting to Protect Journalists

At the International Press Institute Congress in 2002, Chris Cramer, then president of CNN International Networks, issued a wake-up call to the profession. "Journalists and those who support them are more in harm's way than ever before," he observed. "And those of us who manage and assign them have a greater than ever responsibility to ensure we do everything possible for our staff." Leaders of other international news organizations echoed this sentiment and urged concerted action.

Following this meeting, some 80 news organizations, journalist support groups, and humanitarian organizations came together in Brussels and set up the INSI. Launched on World Press Freedom Day in 2003, it is the only international journalist support organization focused solely on safety issues. Through training, exchange of information, and other informed guidance, INSI aims to equip journalists to pursue brave reporting with an improved chance of getting back alive. [See box on this page for more information about the INSI.]

Of course, conflict journalism can never be safe, but journalists can be trained how to look after themselves better. Far too often, journalists are the only professionals on a battlefield who have received no preparation for what they are facing. And the plight of local journalists in the developing world who toil at the roots of the world information flow is particularly acute.

During the past two years INSI has raised sufficient money from international donors to provide basic safety training in 11 countries, including Iraq, to more than 500 journalists who were unable to afford their own. Many of them work for international outlets as stringers and freelancers. Hundreds more remain in dire need, lacking even basic knowledge, training or equipment, while danger levels rise inexorably. INSI has created regional safety networks in East and South Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East to focus on aid efforts and provide real-time risk assessment for journalists planning assignments or who are already on the scene. Other INSI activities include:

**Initiating a series of safety debates** for news media professionals, focusing on lessons learned in conflicts, and acting as a clearinghouse for advice on safer coverage of high-risk stories, such as avian flu and other human and natural disasters.

**Engaging in behind-the-scenes discussions** with military organizations aimed at improving understanding and communication between armies and journalists on the battlefield—and at ensuring prompt and open inquiries when fatalities occur. We achieved a breakthrough this year with the British Ministry of Defence that, for the first time, agreed to inscribe journalist safety measures in its "Green Book" bible for military-media operations in war. The measures do not go far enough, but it is an encouraging beginning by a major military power.

**Undertaking a global inquiry**—the first of its kind—into the rising number of journalist deaths around the world, led by an investigative committee comprising news organizations, individual journalists, journalist support groups, and international legal experts. The inquiry aims to produce a report and recommendations for actions to be taken by the international community. These might include changes to the laws that govern conflict, changes to attitudes that encourage impunity, and

changes to the rules of engagement that govern armies in war.

**Convincing the United Nations** to act to give journalists the protections they deserve for the essential work they do. [See box on page 69 about the United Nations.]

INSI recognizes that journalists also need to reexamine their attitudes and approaches to reporting on conflict in an increasingly polarized world in which journalistic neutrality, once taken for granted, no longer widely applies. They and their employers must educate themselves better on safety measures, equipment and social conditions surrounding conflict. They must also rid themselves of any lingering idea that they are somehow special and invulnerable. Bravery on its own isn't enough. ■

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## International News Safety Institute: The Work It Does

International News Safety Institute (INSI) is a nonprofit organization comprised of journalists working on behalf of other journalists. As such, it requires the support of concerned journalists and news organizations for its work to continue. Chris Cramer, the managing director of CNN International and honorary president of INSI, has expressed his frustration that broadcasters and agencies lead the way on safety. "Newspapers and magazines ... have been the slowest in making this a priority," he said in remarks he made in 2002. That situation has not changed much in the past four years. INSI counts only three newspapers in its 60-plus membership. More information about INSI can be found at [www.newssafety.com](http://www.newssafety.com) ■ —R.P.

# The Forces Threatening Journalism

‘The challenges facing news professionals—and threatening journalism in the public interest—are significant and cannot be avoided.’

*“If someone says that he cares for some individual, community or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm or danger on his, her or its behalf, he puts in question the genuineness of his care and concern. Courage, the capacity to risk harm or danger to oneself, has its role in human life because of this connection with care and concern. That is not to say that a man cannot genuinely care and also be a coward. It is in part to say that a man who genuinely cares and has not the capacity for risking harm or danger has to define himself, both to himself and to others, as a coward.” —From “After Virtue,” by Alasdair MacIntyre*

By Jay Harris

The great challenge of our time is this: The institutions that form the foundation and superstructure of America’s political and social life are being distorted and disrupted by powerful, impersonal, corrosive forces. Among the most consequential of these are technology, individualism, commercialism and American capitalism.

These same forces threaten American journalism. Resisting the damage being done to journalism by these forces requires courage—courage in the form of a willing assumption of personal risk in defense of a strong, vital and public-spirited free press as a necessary institution of American democracy.

The challenges facing news professionals—and threatening journalism in the public interest—are significant and cannot be avoided. The facts of the situation are these: The past cannot be recaptured. News organizations supported by businesses caught between the realities of the marketplace and the demands of American capitalism will

continue to erode journalism’s service to the public.

But the forces challenging journalists and threatening the best journalism are not irresistible. Journalists who face these challenges can help shape a new and more hopeful future for their profession and for America.

What does courage in journalism look like? Where is it to be found?

The battle to preserve the best and most important journalism—journalism in the public interest—is being fought on many fronts. In the day-to-day practice of journalism examples come easily to mind. They include the defense by individual reporters and editors of the profession’s highest standards and purposes. The standards of responsible journalism in the public interest are the foundation of the public’s trust and help define journalism as a public trust. Journalism’s highest purpose is the undaunted pursuit of stories and truths citizens need to know in our self-governing republic in order to fulfill their civic responsibility.

Frequently the battle is fought in organizations or in defense of the broader institution of journalism. The battles are not witnessed by many. Few are directly involved in the contest but, if the contest at these levels is lost, the tradition of journalism as a public trust—with its paramount obligation to the public weal, an obligation that developed and evolved over the life of the republic—may be lost.

Perhaps the best example of courage in a news organization in the recent history of American journalism was the decision by then-Washington Post Publisher Katharine Graham to publish the Vietnam War-era Pentagon Papers in the face of threats from the Nixon White House. She weighed the risk of losing her company against the responsibility of her newspaper to the public and chose the latter.

Few are the publishers of newspapers who would—oreven could—make such a decision today. The same is true for the general managers of broadcast stations. But, in fairness, it should be noted that on many days each year in news organizations large and small, similar, if less dramatic, acts of courage do occur.

## Courage and Capitalism

What constitutes the courageous act at the level of the institution of journalism as an instrument of self-government in the American republic?

Of the four forces—technology, individualism, commercialism and American capitalism—challenging our nation and threatening its free and responsible press, the most powerful and pernicious is American capitalism, which is eating away at businesses that have supported journalism for decades.

The newsbusiness (or “the industry” as some call it) is the source of the essential financial support for the institution of journalism—but the business and the institution are not the same. The imperatives of the marketplace for capital and customers have replaced the ethic of stewardship for journalism as a public trust and the highest priority for most of today’s news executives and owners. The priorities and direction of the news business have, primarily as a result of so-called “public” ownership (or, more accurately, ownership by institutional investors), been taken over by the powerful imperatives of American capitalism.

In his book “The Soul of Capitalism,” journalist William Greider writes that American capitalism has many strengths, but “one large incapacity” in the “logic” of the system. “As a matter of principle,” he says, capitalism “cannot take society’s interests into

account. The company's balance sheet has no way to recognize costs that are not its own, no reason or method to calculate the future liabilities it causes but that someone else will have to pay. The incentives, in fact, run hard in the opposite direction."

As the contemporary mainstream news business is slowly but systematically stripped bare by the demands of capitalism, the cost to society that is not recognized on its balance sheet is the degradation of the press as an institution of democracy and an instrument of self-government.

So again we might ask, what constitutes the courageous act at the level of the institution of journalism?

Would it matter if we asked? Wouldn't any act of courage be a bit late now? Haven't the self-interested values of business effectively triumphed already over the values of news coverage in the public interest? Aren't the majority of businesses that support and manage journalism controlled by institutional investors who sap it for profit at their whim or demand? Haven't the corporate barbarians already crashed through the gates to the city and through the doors of the temple—sacking the for-

mer and defiling the latter?

The roll call of vandals includes familiar names: General Electric, Disney, Clear Channel, Sinclair Broadcast Group, MediaNews, Gannett, Knight Ridder, and Tribune. Notwithstanding responsible, courageous deeds each can legitimately point to, each has acted in ways that have weakened journalism as an institution of our democracy and as an instrument of self-government.

### Individual Courage

So what can a journalist do?

The distinguished 20th century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's famous Serenity Prayer asks that each person who recites it be granted "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

This is particularly wise advice for those with the courage to face the threat to journalism that serves the needs of the republic, its citizens, and their democracy. Change will happen—but change need not be bad altogether.

Most acts of courage are not big; most are not noticed. Most will not bring acclaim and, in fact, will not be

recognized as courageous acts. Most are everyday acts of principle that build character and reflect it.

Courage will lie in refusing to take a path that is inconsistent with one's values and commitments, regardless of the cost. But courage is not reckless. Wisdom requires understanding the difference between the inconsequential and the inviolable.

Courage will lie in accepting the inevitability of change and working to ensure change yields good outcomes.

Courage will lie in working to preserve the essential in what is and in taking the risk of creating alternatives to support it—in determining how enduring values can be preserved and practiced in the future. ■

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## Telling a Story That No Other Newspaper Will Tell

'If we don't print these stories about the casino, who will? People need to see this . . .'

By Stephen G. Bloom

Teaching journalism, as I do, is difficult today no matter where you do it. But in Iowa, it's especially tough. Iowa's newspapers are in a sorry state. Iowa's largest newspaper, The Des Moines Register, bought by Gannett in 1985, once was one of America's great newspapers. In its heyday, the Register had a combined circulation of 380,000. Today, circulation has slipped to 152,800. The paper runs ads on page one—often stickers above the fold that readers have to peel off to see the lead story. News has given way to boosterism, paid obituaries, canned celebrity gossip, and sappy

feel-good stories. In the Sunday paper, puff pieces reign—where to go in the state and what the weather will be once you get there. It's a sorry end to what was a remarkable legacy.

The largest newspaper closest to where I live is the locally owned The (Cedar Rapids) Gazette, with a circulation of 63,000. When I first moved here 13 years ago from San Francisco, I awakened one Easter morning to read a banner headline in The Gazette, "He Has Risen." The newspaper has not improved.

Because there are so few local exemplars, relatively few Iowa students

today know what constitutes a good newspaper. Few 20-year-olds have an idea what a gracefully written profile or a masterful investigative story is, because they've never read one in an Iowa newspaper.

That's precisely why I wanted to teach a new class for master's journalism students. As what Professor David Protess at Northwestern did with the Medill Innocence Project, 12 journalism students would spend 15 weeks reporting and writing on one issue. My hope was that we'd break new ground in a state fertile with unreported stories.

What I didn't count on was that my students would get to experience firsthand what courage looks like in newspaper journalism today.

## The Untouched Story

Certainly, there were enough topics for the students—feces-infested drinking water, the continued decimation of a once-robust farm economy, the proliferation of filthy meatpacking plants, to name a few. But there was one issue that begged to be investigated: the state's largest casino resort, scheduled to open in four months in a rural town 15 miles south of the University of Iowa.

In just two decades, casino gambling has spread like a disease in Iowa, with nary a dissent coming from the state legislature. The state has become addicted to millions of dollars in revenue from gambling. And 70 paid pro-casino lobbyists in Des Moines aim to keep it that way. The only thing left to do seems to be to build more casinos.

No Iowa newspaper had examined legalized gambling in a thorough, comprehensive way as a project, and none had covered the range of implications of the casino, scheduled to open in September in Riverside, a speck of a farming community with 928 residents. Many newspapers in this state look at casinos as sacred cash cows of advertising revenue. There may be a cause-and-effect economic explanation for the paucity of coverage, or it may be that editors at these papers don't have the resources to cover the topic adequately. It also may be that editors don't see legalized gambling as an essential story for their readers.

Whatever the reason, it left the door wide open for my students. After snooping around Riverside for eight weeks, the students came up with an arsenal of stories. Here are several:

- The casino owner had paid a Chicago consulting firm—which had racked up victories in six other Iowa gambling referenda, as well as worked on Bill Clinton and John Kerry's presidential campaigns—more than a quarter of a million dollars

to convince locals to approve gambling in Riverside. The out-of-state consultants outspent locals 50 to one, spending nearly \$100 per vote, for a referendum that squeaked by with just 352 votes. In doing so, the pro-casino forces broke state campaign-disclosure laws by concealing contributions.

- The Riverside sheriff, who oversees a police force of just nine deputies, conceded that his officers will be overwhelmed with the 1.6 million gamblers expected to show up in town. He described the casino as a disaster in the making.
- Despite what Iowa casino proponents promised—that a percentage of revenues will go to schools in districts where casinos are located—little revenue ever gets allocated to education. In a similar Iowa town to Riverside, for the first five years of casino operation nothing was distributed to schools. In the sixth year, the casino coughed up a measly \$65,000 into school coffers.
- The incidence of bankruptcy, divorce and domestic abuse jumps astronomically in rural communities once a casino opens.

With our Riverside Project, the idea was to shine a light into very dark corners. But would the students' reporting ever get published? What newspaper would print such explosive stories?

## A Gutsy Publisher Steps Up

Early in the semester, I had approached Bill Casey, the publisher of *The Daily Iowan*, the independent newspaper that circulates on the campus and in Iowa City. Casey, who has been publisher of the 20,500-circulation *Daily Iowan* for 30 years, immediately said yes to publishing the stories in a special section in which no ads would appear; he believed running advertisements would undermine the copy. At the time, Casey figured the project would be a four- or eight-page tabloid section.

As we got closer to our publication date, the copy swelled. I edited fiercely. Students were not used to such tight editing and many told me so. But they

had gotten at the nub of the story. They produced a project of more than 16,000 words, spread over 21 articles. With the help of Jennifer Sturm, the editor of *The Daily Iowan*, we started laying out pages. The project had mushroomed to 24 pages.

Casey was in a bind. He had given his word to publish the project, but the costs to him—both in pages published with no ads and a possible loss in ad sales because of the content of these stories—were potentially huge. This was made even more apparent after the Riverside Casino started taking out large display ads in the A-section of the newspaper, looking for blackjack dealers and roulette wheel operators among University of Iowa students.

The day before we went to press, Casey paced the newsroom, shaking his head. "You have tenure, they can't fire you," he told me. "Twenty-four pages and no ads? I ought to have my head examined."

I asked Casey if he wanted to shrink the project. I didn't bring up another option—to kill it.

But Casey was resolute. He looked me straight on and said, "If we don't print these stories about the casino, who will? People need to see this." Casey was talking like John Peter Zenger.

"Just make sure we don't get sued," Casey said. "That's all I ask."

The *Daily Iowan* published our project on May 5th. The students truly broke new ground, and so far we haven't gotten sued. And Casey didn't get fired, although some on the business side of his newspaper complained that he was giving away the store.

While Casey works for an 11-person board and *The Daily Iowan* is a nonprofit corporation, the newspaper still has to bring in money. Printing the project, and doing so without ads, was a decision few newspaper publishers would even consider.

"You can't adequately cover the impact of legalized gambling in the daily news pages," said Casey. "It's too complicated. Sometimes you do things that don't make money. You can't do it all the time, but you have to do it occasionally because that's what

newspapers ought to be doing. Why else are we in this business?"

The Daily Iowan boasts some terrific journalists in its 138-year history, from former New York Times feature writer Judy Klemesrud and former Los Angeles Times cartoonist Paul Conrad to Neil Brown, executive editor of the St. Petersburg Times and Kirsten Scharnberg, national correspondent for the Chicago Tribune.

For the 125-year reunion of the paper in 1993, Casey spent two days reading microfilm of the newspaper decade-by-decade. "And you know what? I never knew if one year the paper made money and another year it lost money. In 100 years, no one's going to look at how much money we made in 2006. What people will look at is how we covered the events of our time. That's our job."

### Room for Good Reporting

Is Bill Casey courageous? Considering the bottom-line mentality of journalism today, I think he is. After all, good reporting is only possible if there's a brave publisher willing to print it.

Good reporting requires money. It takes time and experience. And to do it right requires space, sometimes lots of it. Words can be edited and paired down, but good reporting can't be

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**'Sometimes you do things that don't make money. You can't do it all the time, but you have to do it occasionally because that's what newspapers ought to be doing. Why else are we in this business?'** —*Bill Casey*

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done in 14-inch snippets. Good reporting invites trouble. It courts lawsuits. It tempts angry responses from advertisers and readers. For the majority of American newspapers these days, such risks are seldom worth taking.

When I was a reporter for The Sacramento Bee in the 1980's, I covered a severe drought on the central coast of California. Parts of the region hadn't been soaked with a downpour in five years. I headed to a children's playground, chatted up a mother and

father, and interviewed their five-year-old daughter.

"Do you know what rain is?" I asked her.

The girl looked puzzled. "I think so . . . I've seen rain on TV. It's like when they open up the faucet in the sky, right?"

Many of my journalism students view quality journalism the way that little girl looked at rain. They've heard about it, they sort of know what it is, but they've never experienced it themselves.

Now they have. ■

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## H.L. Mencken: Courage in a Time of Lynching

Subscriptions were cancelled, threats made on him and Sunpapers' staff, and advertisers' products were boycotted, but Mencken's words were published.

By Marion Elizabeth Rodgers

On December 4, 1931, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, an African American named Matthew Williams shot and killed his white employer, then turned a pistol on himself, inflicting a wound. Staggering away from the scene of the crime, he was shot by the employer's son, then arrested and taken to a Salisbury hospital. Hours later, a mob descended on the building, seized Williams, dropped him from a window, dragged him to the courthouse green, and hung him from

a tree. A crowd of 2,000 men, women and children cheered. The body was then doused with gasoline and burned. One member of the mob cut off several of Williams's toes and carried them off as souvenirs.

It was the first lynching the state had witnessed in 20 years. The local townspeople celebrated the occasion by draping the tree with an American flag.

"Had the outrage occurred in some other Southern state, this might have

been the end of it," noted the New York Outlook. As it happened, the lynching occurred in Maryland, a state that took pride in the Sunpapers—the (Baltimore) Sun and the Evening Sun. The family-owned institution had a reputation for accuracy, fairness and independence, free from private interests. Its publisher, Paul Patterson, always stood by his men. On the lynching story, the Sunpapers lived up to their reputation. The editorial pages issued denunciations of the lynchers,

demanding that the perpetrators be arrested and tried.

But it was the Sunpapers' most famous columnist, H.L. Mencken, who helped lead his newspaper into a contentious fight that raged for years. Mencken's fame, as journalist Alistair Cooke noted, was "rightly grounded on the vigor he brought to unpopular causes." At the end of all the controversies, even his enemies came to realize that Mencken's great strength was his courage.

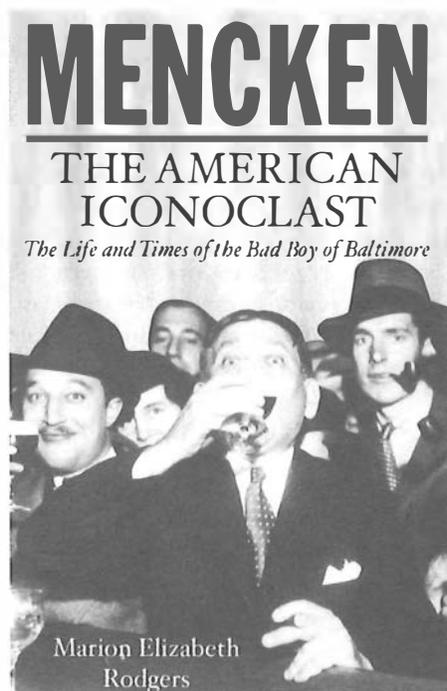
### Criticism of Press Cowardice

The 1931 lynching on the Eastern Shore revolted Mencken; he was furious that no one had done anything to stop Williams's murder, only one of more than 5,000 lynchings that had occurred in the United States since 1922. Equally disturbing was what Mencken perceived as the cowardice of some of the press on the Eastern Shore. Editors played down details of the atrocity in order to cool off the explosive atmosphere.

In his column—carried in the Sunpapers—Mencken singled out the Salisbury Times and the Cambridge Daily Banner as prime examples of "a degenerating process" that had been undermining the region for years. The Banner, Mencken said, had criticized the lynching "formally, but only formally." The Salisbury Times, he wrote, "went to almost incredible length of dismissing the atrocity as a 'demonstration.' Well, the word somehow fits. It was indeed a demonstration of what civilization can come to in a region wherein there are no competent police, little save a simian self-seeking in public office, no apparent intelligence on the bench, and no courage and decency in the local press. Certainly it would be irrational to ask for enlightenment in communities whose ideas are supplied by such pathetic sheets as the Cambridge Daily Banner and the Salisbury Times." Pulitzer Prize-winning Sunpapers' cartoonist Edmund Duffy drew a sketch of the lynching to accompany Mencken's article on the editorial page, ironically captioning his cartoon with the title of the state

anthem, "Maryland, My Maryland."

Editors from the Worcester Democrat of Pocomoke City, Maryland accused Mencken and Duffy of being "jealous" because they had not gotten to "enjoy" the lynching. Mencken reprinted extracts from the Worcester Democrat in his subsequent column. "They serve very well," he wrote, "to show what effect the lynching spirit, if it is allowed to go unchecked, has



upon the minds of simple people—even upon the more literate minority thereof." The Eastern Shore, Mencken wrote, was being run by "its poor white trash" that still accepted "the brutish imbecilities" of the Ku Klux Klan. Mentally and morally, he said, "it has been sliding out of Maryland and into the orbit of Arkansas and Tennessee, Mississippi and the more flea-bitten half of Virginia." He proposed the shore be detached from Maryland and joined to Delaware and Virginia to form a new state to be called "Delmarva."

### The Price Paid

Within 48 hours of Mencken's column being published, thousands of dollars worth of orders from Baltimore's retailers were cancelled by cities along the Eastern Shore. As the 1931 Christmas

season approached, residents who regularly shopped in Baltimore now began going to Wilmington and Philadelphia.

Alarmed, members of the Baltimore Association of Commerce, including the Western Newspaper Union, bought advertisements in Baltimore and shore papers appealing for good will. "Please do not judge the people of Baltimore by what appears in the Baltimore Sun," one read. "The Sun is being condemned on all sides by the people of this city, who feel that Mencken's article was a most disgraceful attack on one of the finest sections of the state."

The Sunpapers' office was besieged with complaints. Subscriptions were cancelled. Stores that sold copies of the newspaper were forced to stop, on threat of boycott. Copies of the Sunpapers were thrown on the streets and burned before they could be placed on sale. Two circulation trucks were ambushed, their papers thrown away, and their drivers beaten. Reporters who went to Salisbury to cover the story were threatened with violence. According to Mencken, one of the photographers, Robert F. Kniesche, "was saved from rough handling, and maybe even murder, only by escaping in an airship."

Talk of revenge went on for weeks. The editor of the Easton Journal advised Mencken not to set foot on the Eastern Shore "for the next 20 years. In Salisbury, they'd rather lynch you." He warned that Mencken's toes, and perhaps his ears, might be taken as souvenirs. The publisher of the Crisfield Journal called Mencken "a curse on humanity." Bundles of letters reached Baltimore criticizing Mencken for writing "crap" and the Sunpapers as "not even fit for the outhouse." As Mencken recalled, "The main charge was that I was an apologist for drunkards, whores and murderers, but there were also correlative charges that I was both a Communist and a German spy."

When a second lynching occurred in Princess Anne, Maryland in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's refusal to speak out on the atrocity was a matter of discussion throughout the country. Determined that this outrage

not be dismissed, Mencken joined forces with Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP to promote the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill that would make lynching a capital offense. Mencken's impassioned testimony in support of the bill galvanized senators on the committee. Predictably, Roosevelt refused to challenge the Southern leadership of his party, and the bill died.

Undeterred, the Sunpapers printed the story of the lynching in large headlines. Once again subscriptions were cancelled; once again circulation men, reporters and photographers were threatened. "A curious feature of the whole uproar was that public opinion in Baltimore seemed to be predominantly on the side of the lynchers," recalled Mencken. "I got more threatening letters from city people than from the simians of the lower Shore itself."

Amid the economic hardship of the Great Depression, when every loss of a subscriber mattered, the paper's

publisher, Paul Patterson, held his ground. African-American journalist George Schuyler, of the Pittsburgh Courier, later said Mencken and the Sunpapers "had guts."

Animosity towards the Sunpapers lingered for years. "Baltimore was as segregated racially as Johannesburg," recalled former New York Times' columnist Russell Baker. Although the Sun was an all-white newspaper, there were those who still thought the Sunpapers "soft" on black people, rooted in the columns Mencken had written denouncing the lynchers.

Elsewhere, however, there was praise. "The Sunpapers have fulfilled the best traditions of intelligent journalism," wrote the editors of New York Outlook. "Newspapers are not police forces, nor prosecutors, nor courts. Their job is not to arrest, try and punish the perpetrators of crimes. Their job is rather to inform and arouse the public so that these processes may be carried out. If they accept and work

at it as hard as the Sunpapers have done, over a period of time they can exert an enormous influence for the good. The two Baltimore papers have given other newspapers a high mark to shoot at."

In 1934, the Nation magazine placed Mencken on its Honor Role of the Nation for his denunciation of the two lynchings. But on the Eastern Shore he remained persona non grata, detested even in Ocean City, a seashore town 25 miles from Salisbury. Characteristically philosophical, Mencken was unperturbed. As he put it, "Inasmuch as I had no desire to be admired by morons I let the Shoremen howl." ■

*Marion Elizabeth Rodgers is the author of "Mencken: The American Iconoclast," which was published in 2005 by Oxford University Press.*

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## Heroes in the Tough Transition to Digital News

A long-time newspaper journalist assesses the courage required if essential values are to be retained.

By Davis 'Buzz' Merritt

In a realistic admission in the spring that it would take time—perhaps years—for McClatchy Company to regain its financial momentum after it acquired Knight Ridder, Gary Pruitt, the company's president, CEO and chairman said, "I'll take long-term gain over short-term decline." What made his words significant is his assurance that time would be available.

In today's Wall Street, a \$4.5 billion deal is less than routine. Soap makers, coat hanger companies, tomato canners attract more buyers and money, if not more attention, than did the nation's second largest newspaper publisher when it was forced by a group of restless investors to put itself on the auction block. So in most contexts,

Pruitt's words were unremarkable. But for journalists at the 20 newspapers to be retained by McClatchy they were a jolt of encouragement and, for those at the dozen to be sold, they contained at least a glimmer of hope. It had been years since any corporate person with sway over their journalistic efforts had expressed a commitment to more than short-term financial results.

And for the U.S. newspaper industry caught in a maelstrom of disruptive technology and financial stress, Pruitt's declaration offered a respite, if only of the briefest sort. For that short moment, it was possible to imagine a world beyond the turbulence that threatens to destroy the newspaper journalism upon which democracy depends.

### Newspaper Journalism

During the 300 years of their history, American newspapers gradually developed the standards, practices and layered processes that make newspaper journalism the core of the public affairs information that sustains democracy. And owners of newspapers discovered early that they could make good money publishing them. For some, that was enough. Other owners, differently motivated, believed that publishing newspapers was an important public service, and the fact that good money could be made doing it only made the process that much more rewarding. Well into the 20th century, newspapers, with owners of both sorts, held a virtual

monopoly on mass communication of information, but this situation was not to last. As other methods of telling news emerged—radio, broadcast television, 24-hour cable news, the Internet—each brought fresh predictions that newspapers were doomed.

Those predictions have not come about, but now greed and short-term thinking are the enemies of newspapers' survival—and, if we are not careful, newspaper journalism. If newspaper journalism withers away because those who own papers do not understand and appreciate its intrinsic and crucial strengths and its role in democracy, much more will be gone than simply one particular and traditional way of telling news.

Democracy can exist without newspapers, but it cannot exist without newspaper journalism and the unique attributes it brings to its synergy with democracy. Those include:

- Depth of reporting based on multiple sourcing
- Professional objectivity—that is, avoiding a particularistic voice
- Accountability
- A layered process of fact-checking and editing
- Community coherence—that is, a clear concept of who is being served and why
- Recognition of the responsibilities inherent in journalism's agenda-setting role
- Ethical underpinnings, including distinguishing between fact and opinion.

Migrating newspaper journalism onto new platforms will, however, require time and experimentation opportunities that are not overwhelmed by the pressure for constant bottom-line improvement on an already robust base of 20-and-up percent operating return. And it will require dedicated people acting bravely.

When (not, pray, if) newspaper

journalism is successfully transferred to whatever technologies emerge, who will have been the heroes?

### Journalism's Heroes

The heroes in this transition will be publishers and corporate officers and board members and, yes, even shareholders who realized that public service journalism was in trouble, is the priority outweighing all others, and who were willing to sacrifice short-term profits to sustain it. Making a successful transition from print to digital will be a marathon run requiring time and oxygen supply, and only the money people can ensure those.

They will be reporters flexible enough to embrace the new ways of convergence but firm enough not to succumb to the journalistic shortcuts or fall into the traps of self-indulgence and personal aggrandizement that convergence technology so beguilingly offers. The essential values that drive newspaper journalism cannot be a cloak that is donned only in newspaper newsrooms and laid aside in digital environments. The standards and motivations must be migrated along with the facts and words and personalities. That requires reporters to exercise both personal restraint and the discipline not to let the pressure of round-the-clock deadlines corrupt the reporting. Some early convergence experience indicates that otherwise solid reporters are drawn to act differently on a Weblog or Webcast. That is deadly.

They will be editors who insist upon that constancy and resist the enormous internal pressures to dilute the hard-news content that is the historic core of the newspaper journalism franchise. These heroes will not crumble under the assault from outsiders who equated aggressive reporting with a lack of patriotism, nor will they heed the taunts of surrendering insiders who declare the end of what they derisively call "eat your spinach journalism" in favor of more

Britney and Katie, cat columns and Snoop Dogg, and ill-informed rhetoric posing as public conversation.

They will be economists and lawyers who fashioned innovative ownership models to move public service journalism beyond the reach of Wall Street's insistence upon ever-increasing profits without, perversely, making it subject to even more threatening political pressures inherent in tax and public policy concessions implicit in some models.<sup>1</sup>

They will be public-minded non-journalists who, taking advantage of the Web's ready and cheap access, used blogs and other techniques for more than blustering: nongovernmental organizations, foundations and even affinity groups that, though admittedly mission-driven, unearthed and circulated hard data not readily within reach of journalists but verifiable by them.

And, bless their hearts, they will be bloggers who, by thinking of the odd question or snagging contradictory information out of the rushing stream of data they watch, enriched the public conversation and expanded the necessarily limited reach of professional journalists.

### Will Newspaper Journalism Survive?

Can newspaper journalism survive the eventual passing of newspapers themselves? Will the substance provided by newspaper journalism, even with all its faults, be present in the dominant new forms of communication just over the horizon?

If newspaper companies continue to sublimate their obligations to public service and democracy to ever-increasing profit considerations, the answer is most certainly "no." And if serious journalism continues to be replaced by news-as-entertainment, the answer is almost certainly "no."

For newspapers driven by the bottom line, people are seen as customers

<sup>1</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion of alternative ownership models, see the proceedings of The Breaux Symposium, held on March 20, 2004 at Louisiana State University's Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, available at: [www.lsu.edu/reillycenter/67272\\_Breaux\\_Symp.pdf](http://www.lsu.edu/reillycenter/67272_Breaux_Symp.pdf)

to be wooed rather than citizens to be helped, and the nation is seen as an audience to be accumulated and tallied rather than a democracy to be cherished and sustained.

The great irony is that in America no authority can dictate what newspapers ought to do. This is a freedom that stems from, and is essential to, democracy. The democracy that sustains journalism is itself sustained by responsible public service journalism.

Newspaper owners and journalists who fail to understand the connection and act as if it matters will not only destroy themselves but democracy itself.

Those with the courage to stay in the marathon ahead will be not merely survivors but heroes. ■

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*lished by Amacom in 2005. He wrote the book after he retired from Knight Ridder in January 1999. He worked in newspaper journalism for 46 years, 42 of them with Knight Ridder.*

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## Public Support Wanes, Some Journalists Press On

'Despite the low esteem in which the news media are held today, some of the best, most courageous news coverage is being produced.'

By Barry Sussman

Exploring connections between what the public thinks about journalists and whether and how reporters and editors display courage in their work can be tricky territory. We know that most people today do not have high regard for reporters or news organizations, even though important stories, faithfully handled, sometimes elicit great respect. But surveys inform us that majorities, sometimes large ones, think journalists do not care about the people they report on, bully victims of personal disasters until they cry, try to cover up or not accept blame for their mistakes, are in bed with politicians, and quake when the powerful look at them sideways.

Not much middle ground can be found between these disparate assessments. At least that's my reading of public-opinion polls taken during the past 25 years, including ones I was involved with during the 1980's when I ran the news polling operation for The Washington Post.

Of course, there are many journalists who won't be deterred from taking a courageous course in their work, even when they don't sense a great deal of support for what they do. The problem is they are heavily

outnumbered by reporters who are less independent-minded and tend to be more prone to following than leading, as well as by self-censoring editors who too often view challenging stories as headaches.

### What Surveys Tell Us

Since 1973, The Gallup Organization has asked the public about confidence in American institutions. Last year only 28 percent of those interviewed said they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in TV news and in newspapers. Pretty poor scores—the lowest for the press since the questions were first asked. Weak as those ratings were, they still were on a level with confidence in the criminal justice system (26 percent), and better than the scores for organized labor (24 percent), Congress and big business (each at 22 percent) and, lowest of all, HMO's (18 percent).

In 1985, the old Times-Mirror organization sponsored a poll on the news media. On its completion, full-page ads promoting the findings asked: "Is the Watchdog Really a Lapdog?"

Despite the low esteem in which the news media are held today, some

of the best, most courageous news coverage is being produced. And it's being done despite a lot of factors that would mitigate against it. There are all-too-frequent cuts in newsroom staff and the news hole at a time when the antinews climate, set by the Murdoch-Ailes-O'Reilly-Gingrich-Republican Party cable TV crowd, is popular. There is, too, a sustained effort by the President and vice president to discredit the press, with more than \$1.6 billion in spending by the Bush administration on a campaign of propaganda, including support for the creation of fake news by fake reporters. Then there are the Bush administration's varying characterizations of the U.S. press as just another annoying, self-promoting, untrustworthy pressure group, while it proclaims the core value of a free press in its messages about democracy in countries where authoritarian governments now rule.

### Reporting in Different Eras

Some of the 2006 Pulitzer Prizes, for example, honored reporting that was so powerful that, for at least a few moments, all seemed well in the news business.

The Hurricane Katrina coverage of Biloxi, Mississippi's Sun Herald was declared "valorous," while The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune was regarded as "heroic," and its breaking news reporting was said to be "courageous and aggressive coverage ... overcoming desperate conditions facing the city and the newspaper." Some of the journalists' hardest work took place as floodwaters forced an evacuation of their newsroom; many of them lost their homes and dealt with tough personal circumstances while remaining on the job to tell other people's stories.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof's "personal risk" in going to Sudan was acknowledged as he was honored for drawing attention to the horrendous massacres of people in Darfur.

Washington Post and New York Times reporters won Pulitzers for stories that President Bush personally sought to block. The publication of these news stories has led to government leak investigations and recriminations, even the firing of a CIA leak suspect. Secrecy advocates say the reporters should be getting prison terms instead of Pulitzers.

On the April day when the Pulitzers were announced, two newspaper veterans, Jay Harris and Alex Jones, exchanged views on the PBS NewsHour about challenges confronting watchdog reporting in today's inhospitable business environment. Harris, a member of the Pulitzer board and former publisher of the San Jose Mercury News, was impressed by the finalists' work: "... the press as a watchdog did its job remarkably well this year." Emphasizing the value of investigative reporting, Jones, a Pulitzer winner who directs the Shorenstein Center at Harvard University, observed that "in the environment that we're in ... there's probably a lot more work that could be done and should be done that isn't being done because of the sort of turmoil that the newspaper industry is undergoing."

Harris, who resigned in 2001 rather than execute deeper cuts in his staff and

news hole, concurred, and lamented the grip Wall Street profits hold over the news business. He went on to note that "there's still excellent investigative work being done out there, but it's being done as much as anything because of individual journalists and editors who are concerned that this work be

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**... editors are working at a time when shortages of staff and budget are paired with an historic moment when political and societal pressures are aligned against the press.**

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done. Even with the budget cutbacks, they are doing it out of dedication to the best of what journalism is." [See Harris's article on page 71.]

With scarcer resources to devote to what can often be lengthy reporting stints, editors are working at a time when shortages of staff and budget are paired with an historic moment when political and societal pressures are aligned against the press. Before this current administration, the press's most hostile President was Richard Nixon, who used his vice president, Spiro Agnew, as attack dog. Mouthingsly phrases written by William Safire, Agnew labeled the press "nattering nabobs of negativism," describing them as a liberal bunch out of synch with American values.

How does one measure the chilling effect of such characterizations, then and now? By lack of coverage, perhaps? If so, the attacks worked then, and they seem to be working now—a time when similar political pressures combine with the new, difficult financial constraints.

For a long time during Nixon's presidency much of the fourth estate were onlookers, not independent and aggressive in reporting on either the Vietnam War or about Watergate.

Watergate has often been hailed as a great press triumph, but the fact is that only five news organizations did much to move the story along in its crucial

early stages: The Washington Post (where I was in charge of the coverage and given the title "special Watergate editor"), The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the now defunct Washington Star, and Time magazine. Television was absent altogether. In the critical four-and-a-half months from the break-in to the 1972 election, the only broadcast news attempt at telling viewers about Watergate came when Walter Cronkite, on a Friday evening newscast, did a lengthy report in which he recapped news that had been in the papers. He promised a second report on Monday, but CBS Chairman William S. Paley intervened; while there was a second report, it was much abbreviated.

Watergate was a 26-month scandal—from the break-in to Nixon's resignation. About nine months into it a lot more news organizations got to work—pack journalism, it might be called—and began to report the story aggressively and well.

Now in the sixth year of this administration's drive to discredit the press (and therefore make it an irrelevant part of our democracy), news organizations are following a pattern not unlike what happened during the Watergate era. For the first four years or so, including the run-up to the Iraq War, only a small number of journalists at only a few news organizations did independent, aggressive reporting. Using Harris's notion, these were primarily individuals acting out of dedication. Over time, a pack mentality has set in.

As I write this, the Bush administration's K Street and Capitol Hill occupants' arrogance and corruption are fair game. Unfortunately for citizens, the journalists' pack is smaller these days, and they've got a lot of catching up to do. ■

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# Courage of the Wise and Patient Kind

‘Our craft demands such courage if we are to find a constructive way through the many difficulties that challenge us today.’

By Geneva Overholser

All kinds of courage are needed from journalists in 2006: The courage an editor calls upon to run a story despite the anticipated brouhaha; the kind a publisher needs to make the case for newsroom resources, and the kind a CEO needs when talking to analysts about the public interest. The courage a Washington reporter summons to question a politician who will portray the act of questioning as a failure of patriotism. Then there is the courage any newsgatherer must summon to persevere in getting quotes on the record when anonymity is so much easier. And journalists have long relied on courage to speak truth to power. All of these traditional forms of journalistic courage are more essential than ever in our post-9/11 spin-driven, secrecy-proliferating, profit-seeking times.

Other kinds of courage are vital to our work today, too: subtler forms, such as the courage to admit mistakes, acknowledge doubts, hold ourselves accountable, make our work transparent. And there is the courage it takes to vie for a position that no one who looks remotely like you has ever held or to promote to an important post someone whose strengths and leadership style are entirely different than your own.

It is true that certain kinds of courage in our craft continue to be more readily rewarded. Physical courage, so often tested abroad, is rarely required of us here at home; still, we like to be as close to such danger as we can and reward the bold stroke—the pioneering story or the brave speech made to an expected hostile crowd. These are admirable steps, and widely acknowledged as such, whether through prizes, favorable coverage, or slaps on the

back, a way of saying “you made an impact” or “you get credit.” All of this feeds a very satisfying loop.

Then there is the courage that feels more like a slow, hard slog. The courage to keep reporting things no one

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**Wise and patient courage are harder to summon and more difficult to notice than the bold moves we seem to admire most.**

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wants to hear—or worse, that no one does hear. The courage that keeps a journalist toiling away until one day all of the work gets acknowledged by the difference it has made. This is a courage that keeps on believing in that day despite signs that it’s not soon approaching. It’s this strength that pushes a journalist to go on making the phone calls, setting up contacts, writing pieces, all done with the spirit of good cheer and all to the purpose of making happen what the journalist believes will and must eventually happen. This kind of courage is very much like faith.

One of my favorite exemplars of this “we can do it” kind of courage is Philip Meyer, who teaches at the University of North Carolina journalism school. No matter how predictable it is that someone will howl, “But that sounds like credentialing,” or “Journalism isn’t a profession and thank goodness for that,” Meyer holds fast. He has strong beliefs and backs them up with substantial research, which, of course, makes his ideas eminently worthy of serious consideration and, therefore, very likely to make a difference.

If our times call for patient courage, they also demand wise courage. Some journalists are fighting avidly against developments that are identified (accurately for the most part) as solely profit-driven and destructive of good work. But our customary aversion to all change can cause us to do more harm. While we must protect journalism in the public interest, when long-time models of its practice are challenged, wisdom is what we need to enable us to distinguish between traditions we don’t need to cling to—be they ink on paper or the inverted pyramid—and those that we do.

Our craft demands such courage if we are to find a constructive way through the many difficulties that challenge us today.

This kind of courage doesn’t draw attention to those who practice it. Instead it is the speak-it and think-about-it, build-it-slowly and protect-it-from-being-undermined, go-back-at-it-again-after-your-ideas-have-been-dismissed kind of courage. And its feel is less like an explosion, more like water wearing on a stone. Wise and patient courage are harder to summon and more difficult to notice than the bold moves we seem to admire most. But they are precisely the kinds of courage that will likely save journalism. ■

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# Investigative Journalism Doesn't Win Many Friends

'... just about everything has been tried to discourage these kinds of investigations by those who are unhappy with what we find.'

By Charles Lewis

It was 1992, in Moscow, and some of the world's most respected investigative journalists had gathered for an international conference. In the opening hours, stark differences emerged as reporters described conditions they confronted in the practice of independent journalism. The Russian and Ukrainian journalists lamented the losses of their murdered colleagues; British and Indian reporters recounted how they'd been arrested for violating the Official Secrets Act; the reporter from apartheid South Africa grippingly recalled seeing her sources gunned down in the street, and a Colombian journalist told how her sister was murdered following her investigative stories on the Medellin drug cartel. As their turn to speak came, straight-faced American journalists earnestly complained about the government's tardy handling of their Freedom of Information Act requests.

I was struck by the stark, global disparity in daily working circumstances and also the extent to which American reporters lead a distinctly privileged existence, which we rarely acknowledge. Unlike much of the rest of the world, when attempting to ferret out uncomfortable truths inside the United States (and Canada), life and death physical safety is not really an issue. And our constitutional protections of press freedom and our two centuries-old legal system that generally fosters transparency and open discourse about public figures and institutions are distinctive relative to so many other nations.

Fourteen years and several international investigative reporting conferences later, this disparity of privilege still exists. It does so despite the audacious, recent encroachments to the public's ability and right to know,

with rollbacks of various access to information laws nationwide, with the increased federal prosecutorial zeal against journalists, and with the detention of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay Naval base for many years without trial and under the veil of anonymity and absolute secrecy. All of these affronts are reflected in the United States's downward slide to 44th place in Reporters Sans Frontières' 2005 World Press Freedom Index.

But the most urgent, ominous threat to quality commercial journalism in the United States is economic. Courageous and independent watchdog reporting is on the wane, based on the numbers alone: There simply are fewer and fewer professional reporters monitoring those in power. According to the 2006 annual report on the State of the News Media, published by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, while newspaper owners continue to reap 20 percent annual profit margins, they have jettisoned at least 3,500 newsroom professionals since 2000, or seven percent of the editorial workforce nationwide.

In recent years, two newspaper executives very publicly resigned after refusing to lay off more reporters in order to boost their company's already inordinately healthy profits. Jay Harris, the publisher of the San Jose Mercury News, a Knight Ridder newspaper and, just last year, John Carroll, the editor of the Los Angeles Times who had just shepherded the Tribune Company newspaper to five Pulitzer Prizes, could not countenance the continued corporate carnage. It's difficult to overstate the rank-and-file newsroom distrust of owners; it is quite palpable and affects the very soul of journalism itself. After all, just how courageous and independent can reporters be when fewer of

them cover more while also facing the real possibility of unemployment next week, next month, next year?

For roughly 30 years I've been investigating politicians and the powerful forces behind them and, like so many practitioners, I grew increasingly frustrated as many important stories inconvenient to "the powers that be" got spiked or not even assigned. My own tipping point came late in 1988 when, at the age of 35, married with a family, a mortgage, and no savings, I abruptly quit my job as Mike Wallace's producer for "60 Minutes." It was the most impetuous thing I've ever done; friends and colleagues discreetly inquired if perhaps I seriously had lost my mind.

I started searching for a way to do serious and substantive, original investigative journalism at the national level, unfettered by the normal daily time and space limitations or well-titled, well-paid faceless minions (a.k.a. the "suits") telling me what I could or couldn't do. With no management, fundraising or business experience, I began and directed a new, independent effort—known as the Center for Public Integrity, which today is the largest nonprofit investigative reporting organization in the world.

## Oppositional Forces

Washington "access" journalism doesn't really happen at the Center for Public Integrity. Being despised and frozen out by those in power is an occupational hazard of what gets done at the center—indeed, it is a badge of honor for investigative reporters everywhere. For example, within days of the invasion of Iraq we published a report, which found that at least nine of the 30 members of the Defense Policy

## The Center for Public Integrity: What It Is. What It Does.

From its founding in 1989 to the end of 2004, when I stepped down as its director, the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity grew to a full-time staff of 40 people and roughly 20 paid rotating college intern researchers each year. During the center's first 15 years, more than 275 investigative reports, including 14 books, were produced. The center's findings or perspective have been covered in approximately 10,000 news stories in the United States and throughout the world. Its reports

are best known for tracking political influence in Washington, D.C. and in the 50 state capitals. Utilizing dozens of researchers, writers and editors and studying thousands of pages and half a dozen types of federal and state records, a signature product has been the center's quadrennial investigative dissection of the powerful economic interests behind the major presidential candidate, "The Buying of the President," published in each presidential election year. In 1997, the International

Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) project was initiated by the center. It is the first working network of 95 preeminent reporters in 48 countries on six continents and has produced more than half a dozen reports across borders.

More information about the center, including its reports, funding and the awards its work has won, can be found at [www.publicintegrity.org](http://www.publicintegrity.org) —C.L.

Board, the government-appointed group that advises the Pentagon, had ties to companies with more than \$76 billion in defense contracts in 2001 and 2002. Months later, the center reported that Halliburton was by far the Bush administration's favorite contractor in Iraq. We had meticulously tallied and posted all of the major government contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which took 20 of our researchers, writers and editors six months and 73 Freedom of Information Act requests. This effort also involved successful litigation in federal court against the U.S. Army and the U.S. State Department. A lawsuit was necessary because much about the entire contracting process is deliberately hidden and therefore unknown to the public.

All of this inconvenient "truth telling" doesn't make friends in high places, and just about everything has been tried to discourage these kinds of investigations by those who are unhappy with what we find. I've had subpoenas against me issued and had my hotel room stalked. I've been escorted off military bases and threatened with physical arrest. It's been

suggested I leave via a second-story window. Another time a death threat was personally communicated by concerned state troopers who asked us to leave the area immediately. We didn't.

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**Reportorial courage, independence and commitment to community are antidotes to the poisonous combination of falling readership, inordinate shareholder greed, and dwindling newsgathering budgets.**

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Public relations people have been hired to infiltrate the center's news conferences and pose as "reporters" to ask distracting questions. Some of the center's financial donors have been pressured and expensive, frivolous libel litigation that requires years and costs millions of dollars to defend (and, in the end, get dismissed) is used as a form of intimidation.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, it has become painfully evident that the news media is incapable of covering its own economic and political agenda. For example, when a TV network was preparing an

evening news story about one of the center's reports—which had found that broadcasters and telecommunications companies had taken Federal Communications Commission officials on 2,500 all-expense-paid trips over an eight-year period—the piece was pulled from the evening broadcast at 5:30 in the afternoon. A New York network executive scolded his Washington bureau correspondent and producer for letting things get that far that late by developing a story that might embarrass their company: "Are you out of your fucking mind?"

Journalism—and the public—require no-holds-barred reporting, not anticipatory self-restraint, which is Jay Harris's term for self-censorship. Information about crucial issues of our time is needed, not spoon-fed pabulum from officials or market-driven drivel based on focus groups and demographic research to please advertisers. Reportorial courage, independence and commitment to community are antidotes to the poisonous combination of falling readership, inordinate shareholder greed, and dwindling newsgathering budgets.

We've seen some truly inspiring

<sup>1</sup> To defend against this oppositional strategy, The Fund for Independence in Journalism, a 509(a)(3) endowment and legal support organization, was created, with initial foundation contributions totaling \$4 million and a goal of at least \$20 million.

flashes of journalistic excellence, as reflected in the most recent Pulitzer Prizes. The domestic surveillance exposé by James Risen and Eric Lichtblau of *The New York Times*, published over the strenuous objections of the Bush administration, epitomized courage and independence. Is there any better way to stand up to secrecy? Or how about a newspaper's prescient truth telling, which predicted what would happen to its city if it was hit by a ferocious natural disaster, and then, after it happened three years later, managing to publish in spite of having to abandon

its offices that, along with many of its employees' homes, were underwater. It's hard to recall a prouder, more courageous moment than *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans defying the odds and publishing "come hell and high water," a phrase the paper's staff wore on their T-shirts after the levees broke.

What happened in New Orleans might serve us well as we think about our beleaguered profession. As watchful observers point to dangerous fault lines developing in many of the institutions that once supported what report-

ers do, will journalists, publishers and broadcasters summon the courage of their convictions and commit themselves to doing the work on which our democracy depends? ■

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## Seeking Journalistic Courage in Washington, D.C.

"The disturbing trend is that more and more of these informational offerings are nothing but PR peddled as "news.""

By Walter Pincus

Courage in journalism today takes all the obvious, traditional forms—reporting from a war zone or from a totalitarian country where a reporter's life or safety are issues. In Washington, D.C., where I work, it's a far less dramatic form of courage if a journalist stands up to a government official or a politician who he or she has reason to believe is not telling the truth or living up to his or her responsibilities.

But I believe a new kind of courage is needed in journalism in this age of instant news, instant analysis, and therefore instant opinions. It also happens to be a time of government by public relations and news stories based on prepared texts and prepared events or responses. Therefore, this is the time for reporters and editors, whether from the mainstream media or blogosphere, to pause before responding to the latest bulletin, prepared event, or the most recent statement or backgrounder, whether from the White House or the Democratic or Republican leadership on Capitol Hill. Of course, I'm not talking about reporting of a bomb blowing up in a restaurant, soldiers being shot,

police caught in a firefight, a fire, an accident, a home run in the ninth to win a game, an Oscar winner, or a drop in the stock market.

I also am talking solely from the point of view of a reporter who has spent almost 50 years watching daily coverage of government in Washington become dominated by increasingly sophisticated public relations practitioners, primarily in the White House and other agencies of government, but also in Congress or interest groups and even think tanks on the left, right or in the center. Today there is much too much being offered about government than can be fit into print or broadcast on nightly news shows. The disturbing trend is that more and more of these informational offerings are nothing but PR peddled as "news."

At the beginning of the Reagan administration, Michael Deaver—one of the great public relations men of our time—began to use an early morning "tech" session at the White House as something more than notice to television producers as to when and where the President would appear each day. He turned that meeting, which began in

prior administrations to help network news television producers plan use of their camera crews each day, into an initial shaping of the news story for that evening. He would roughly say President Reagan will appear in the Rose Garden to talk about his crime prevention program and will discuss it in terms of Chicago and San Francisco. That would allow the networks to shoot B-roll matter in those two cities so there would be pictures other than the President speaking when it went on the evening news.

The President would appear, make his statement, perhaps take a question or two, and vanish. After a while, the network White House correspondents would attend these early morning tech sessions and even later print reporters did. On days when there was nothing prepared and the President went off to Camp David or his California ranch, ABC News White House correspondent Sam Donaldson began his shouted questions—and those flip answers became the nightly news, and not just on television. The *Washington Post*, which prior to that time did not have a standing White House story scheduled

each day (running one only when the President did something new and thus newsworthy), began to have similar daily coverage.

At the end of Reagan's first year, David Broder, the Post's distinguished political reporter, wrote a column about Reagan being among the least involved Presidents he had covered. The result was he received an onslaught of mail from people who repeatedly said they had seen him every night on TV working different issues. The often told Deaver story is that one night CBS News correspondent Leslie Stahl met him after narrating a particularly critical piece on Reagan, and Deaver told her as long as the President was on camera smiling it didn't matter what she had said about him.

When President George H.W. Bush succeeded Reagan and occasionally drifted off the appointed subject, criticism began to appear that he "couldn't stay on message." When Bill Clinton arrived and as President did two, three or four things in a day, some critics

went after him for "mixing up the daily message."

The truth of the matter is that with help from the news media, being able to "stay on message" is now considered a presidential asset, perhaps even a requirement. Of course, the "message" is the public relations spin that the White House wants to present and not what the President actually did that day or what was really going on inside the White House. This system reached its apex this year when the White House started to give "exclusives"—stories that found their way to Page One, in which readers learn that during the next week President Bush will do a series of four speeches supporting his Iraq policy because his polls are down. Such stories are often attributed to unnamed "senior administration officials." Lo and behold, the next week those same news outlets, and almost everyone else, carries each of the four speeches in which Bush essentially repeats what he's been saying for two years.

A new element of courage in journalism would be for editors and reporters to decide not to cover the President's statements when he—or any public figure—repeats essentially what he or she has said before. The Bush team also has brought forward another totally PR gimmick: The President stands before a background that highlights the key words of his daily message. This tactic serves only to reinforce that what's going on is public relations—not governing. Journalistic courage should include the refusal to publish in a newspaper or carry on a TV or radio news show any statements made by the President or any other government official that are designed solely as a public relations tool, offering no new or valuable information to the public. ■

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## The Muslim Cartoon Controversy Exposed an Absence of Courage

'... the continuing timidity of the American media looked increasingly like cowardice, appeasement, or better-you-than-me cynicism.'

By Doug Marlette

“Give up the cartoonists; they're in the attic.” That is what many of us feel has been our lot since our brethren in Denmark were forced into hiding after drawing likenesses of the Prophet Mohammed. As art will do, “them damn pictures”—“Boss” Tweed's term for Thomas Nast's cartoons from a more innocent time—have exposed not just the internal dynamics of what some call “Islamofascism” but the corresponding corruption of our values and character in the West. Our insides have been illuminated like an electro-

cuted Daffy Duck in an old Warner Brothers cartoon. We now see what we're made of: not a lot of guts, or brains, either.

Admittedly, there's something about cartoons, which are by definition unruly, tasteless and immature, which brings out, if not the ayatollah, at least the disapproving parent in even the most permissive of adults. And granted, there may be a rights-vs.-responsibilities debate to be had over the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten's decision to commission images of Mohammed.

But once these images became a major news story (and given that they easily satisfied Western standards of legitimate commentary and in fact only became internationally controversial after being misrepresented to the larger Muslim world), I can see little reason—other than bodily fear, bottom-line self-preservation, and just poor judgment—that the U.S. media and the public officials entrusted with defending our freedoms wimped out so thoroughly.

To not publish these images because

of misguided sensitivity, we allow nihilistic street mobs from London to Jakarta to define the debate. In effect, our failure to do so means we capitulate to intimidation and threats and negotiate with terrorists. Yet defensiveness about caving in to the imams spread across our nation's editorial pages, while the 24-hour cable news talking heads clucked tongues about some in the irresponsible European press who had reprinted the offending images. Even cartoonist Garry Trudeau assured the San Francisco Chronicle that he would never depict the prophet in his comics in a mocking way; nor would he show improper pictures of Jesus. As Doonesbury's Zonker might say, "Dude, this isn't about you."

The images of Mohammed commissioned by Jyllands-Posten do not mock the prophet any more than I dishonored Jesus Christ when I drew a cartoon of the Last Supper in which Welch's grape juice was served. I was exposing the followers of Christ who used the doctrine of inerrancy to promote a crude agenda; the Danish cartoonists were not only exploring issues of self-censorship and intimidation but also depicting the hijacking of Islam by fanatics like the tormenters of Salman Rushdie and the murderers of filmmaker Theo van Gogh.

I'd further argue that publishing those cartoons was an act of democratic inclusiveness. By engaging satirically with Islam, these brave artists included Muslims as peers in the tradition of satiric self-examination and irreverence that until recently we've taken for granted in the West. Denmark's Muslims might have simply expressed their displeasure through the accepted democratic avenues of their adopted country if their unscrupulous imams and the corrupt Arab governments whose tyranny they serve hadn't manipulated the cartoons by, for example, disseminating some offensive drawings that were not part of the original, rather tame, Danish package, to ignite riots across the Muslim world.

As newspapers in Europe and even Muslim editors in Jordan withstood the intimidation of the jihadists by reprinting the cartoons, the continu-

ing timidity of the American media looked increasingly like cowardice, appeasement, or better-you-than-me cynicism. By denying their audiences the opportunity to look at the images, American media outlets, with few exceptions, kept the public in the dark about the roots of one of the year's major news stories. (Adding to the absurdity of the mainstream media's editorial anguish, the images are only a click away on the Internet.)

Such bad judgment is to be expected from the corporate media culture, but when artists fear for their lives because of something they've drawn, where are the defenders of free expression among their fellow artists in this country? At a certain level I can understand why U.S. newspaper cartoonists, who have seen their jobs shrink from more than 200 only 20 years ago to fewer than 80 today, might be reluctant to stick their necks out. This can explain why there was no special day sponsored by the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists designated to drawing the Prophet Mohammed or, failing that, turning in blank cartoons in solidarity with our fellow Danish artists in hiding.

I had a sense of the global ramifications of the cartoons' publication when last December the culture editor of Jyllands-Posten contacted me for an interview about the threats I'd received after drawing an Arab driving a Ryder truck loaded with a nuke. My cartoon was published in 2002, before the Iraq invasion, with the caption "What Would Mohammed Drive?" Though this cartoon was more inflammatory than any of the ones that caused riots in cities around the world, I was merely denounced on the front page of the Saudi Arab News by the secretary general of the Muslim World League, and my newspaper, syndicate and home computer were flamed with tens of thousands of e-mails, viruses and death threats aimed at intimidating my publishers and shutting me up.

### **Solidarity and Defiance**

Still, this was a bit more excitement than I had in mind when I addressed the

first East-West journalism conference, held in Prague in July 1990, about the incendiary role of the cartoonist. The best political cartoons, I told them, are always created in the spirit of the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution. They question authority, challenge the status quo, and are inevitably accused of "Disturbing the Peace," borrowing the title of Václav Havel's 1990 book. If the editorial cartoons are doing their job, efforts will be made to suppress them.

So in Prague, after hearing the Eastern European journalists repeatedly admonished to be "responsible in their journalism," I took the opportunity to point out that the Japanese word for cartoon is "irresponsible drawings." Responsibility, of course, like beauty, lies always in the eye of the beholder. The reporting of some of the great journalists who were at that conference—dated Vietnam, for example—was often labeled "irresponsible." Václav Havel's writings were called "irresponsible" by the Soviet thought controllers who not long before had convened in the hotel where we were staying. The list of "irresponsible" expression goes on: from The Washington Post's coverage of Watergate to The New York Times's revelations of warrantless wiretapping.

Having grown up in the Southern United States during the era of the civil rights movement, I remember how business, civic and religious leaders called Martin Luther King, Jr. "irresponsible" as a way of disagreeing with his means without having to actually take a moral stand on his ends. Those cautioning "responsibility" in today's cartoon controversy—in both the West and the Middle East—have much in common with those "good people" of the segregated South, who preferred, as King wrote, "a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice." Their own decent, Christian values were embarrassed by terrorists who burned crosses and bombed churches in the name of Jesus, as Islam has been subverted by the hooded thugs of Muslim extremism. And like the leaders of the segregated South, the corrupt

leadership of these Arab countries encourages the anticartoonists because their violent passions are a diversion from the government's neglect and abuse of its people.

Why haven't the true Muslims—moderate religionists, men and women of good will—risen up to condemn those who so disgrace their faith? We constantly ask this question even though the answer is contained in the reluctance of our own instruments of free expression to confront the problem. "Fill the jails" was Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of noncooperation with a nondemocratic system, for making society look at right and wrong in a fresh way, and it was one that Reverend King adapted in 1963 when he flooded the jails of Birmingham to defeat segregation.

Just as nonviolent demonstrations of solidarity and defiance exposed a corro-

sive political system and channeled the outrage of helplessness constructively, so too would a form of cartoon direct action have advanced the true interests of Islam. As King wrote in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with."

In the spiritually expansive style of Gandhi and King, journalists could have summoned their aggregate moral authority and humbly dedicated a page of their newspapers or half a minute of their newscasts to showing the cartoons and explaining why they must, not as a taunt but as a teaching opportunity, as a prayer for coexistence. In supporting Denmark's embattled cartoonists in this way, then the taboo images might

have lost their meaning, as going to jail lost its stigma when it was in the service of freedom. Collecting his Nobel Peace Prize after the Birmingham campaign, King noted that "every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities." Perhaps one day the Jyllands-Posten cartoonists will be recognized for their contributions to democratic health and to a peace truer than the one they have disturbed. ■

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## A Distinction Journalists Like to Ignore

'Journalists, both then and now, too readily allow fears of a public backlash to inhibit their actions.'

By Laurel Leff

**W**hen Nazi Germany forced thousands of Jewish scholars and professionals to flee in the 1930's and early 1940's, many disciplines in the United States made significant efforts to help their persecuted colleagues. One did not—journalism.

Doctors, lawyers, psychologists and musicians established committees to help colleagues who, as a result of anti-Semitic legislation, were no longer allowed to practice their profession in Germany and later in other occupied countries. American journalists established no such committees. Historians, mathematicians, sociologists, chemists and economists added European scholars to their university departments, enabling them to immigrate to the United States outside of restrictive quotas.

Journalism and mass communication departments made no such hires.

When two professors tried to enlist American law schools and American journalism schools in their efforts to retrain European refugees, journalists resisted their entreaties. While 21 law schools agreed to waive tuition and admit refugees, not a single journalism school accepted refugees through the program. While lawyers raised thousands of dollars for living expenses for the refugees enrolled in law schools, newspaper publishers wouldn't even consider such an effort. In fact, the publishers' association refused to allow one of the professors, Harvard's Carl Friedrich, to address their 1939 convention.

Although several factors explain this callousness toward professional

**Buried by  
The Times**

The Holocaust  
and America's  
Most Important  
Newspaper

Laurel Leff



brethren, who at the least were losing their livelihoods and, at the worst, their lives, one factor distinguished journalism from other professions and disciplines—the fear of a negative public response. Indeed, timidity in the face of anticipated public opposition is a recurring journalistic affliction. The news media's participation in the rush to war in Iraq is a recent example; their refusal to help their Jewish colleagues in the 1930's is a particularly repugnant one.

Of course, more benign explanations might account for journalists' reluctance to become involved in the refugee issue. They might have been worried about European refugees' lack of facility with the English language, as well as the tight job market due to the lingering effects of the Great Depression. But other professionals, who proved more welcoming, would have had similar concerns. Journalists might also have fretted about differences between American and European journalism, particularly the partisan nature of much of the European press. But again all disciplines faced challenges in acclimating refugees, and concerns about a different journalistic tradition wouldn't explain the reluctance to retrain Europeans in American journalism.

Instead, journalists may have been stymied by what they perceived to be the public mood. Opinion polls taken in the late 1930's indicated that a majority of Americans opposed greater immigration to the United States, and some of the opposition had anti-Semitic overtones. Journalists would have been uniquely sensitive to those sentiments. Although all disciplines had to overcome anti-Semitism, both latent and blatant, in order to help Jewish refugees, academics could operate within the ivory tower, and other professionals needed to placate only their own constituents, not the public at large. Responding to public concerns, however, is built into the practice of journalism. To avoid appearing to take

sides in what was considered a controversial issue and to avoid alienating Americans hostile to immigration and to Jews, journalists did nothing.

### Journalism and Public Opinion

Journalists, both then and now, too readily allow fears of a public backlash to inhibit their actions. In the ongoing and inevitable tension between leading the public and catering to its whims, journalists lean too much toward the latter. The proliferation of how-to articles and sensationalistic stories are the most obvious contemporary manifestations of this tendency. But more insidious and less discussed is a reluctance to get too far ahead of the public on controversial issues.

The most distressing aspect of this professional tendency is that it seems

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**In the ongoing and inevitable tension between leading the public and catering to its whims, journalists lean too much toward the latter.**

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to be based on little more than vague fears and lack of nerve. For journalists don't really know what the public thinks or how it will react. Even the most refined techniques for measuring audience response can't fully capture the complicated phenomenon of news perceptions. Not only is the audience large and varied but the very nature of the news—that it is in fact new—means the audience often doesn't know, literally, what it wants to know. So journalists tend to react to attitudes about which they can only guess.

Moreover, journalists can project their own biases into the void and then rationalize those prejudices based on public attitudes. Given the blatantly anti-Semitic reasons a few journalism school deans gave for refusing to admit refugees in the 1930's, it's reasonable to conclude at least some of the reluctance to help refugees stemmed from journalists' own prejudices. Yet journalists could avoid confronting

their own anti-Semitism and its implications for both news coverage and refugee assistance by deflecting it upon the audience. Finally, in presuming an audience response, journalists too often fail to take into account the ways in which they have helped shape those very attitudes. If the press failed to report sympathetically on refugee issues for fear of a hostile public response, for example, it is not surprising that an uninformed public remained hostile to those refugees.

Whatever the prevailing mood, journalists abrogate their central responsibility when they allow fear of a negative public reaction to shape their actions. Knowing more than the public and communicating that information is what it means to be a journalist. Journalists therefore must lead, particularly on issues where it's all too easy for prejudice to dominate the public discourse.

In the 1930's, journalists failed in that responsibility and, ironically, may have lagged behind public attitudes. When aid groups first began helping Jewish academics and professionals, they shunned publicity for fear of attracting attention and hostility. By the late 1930's, however, they routinely issued press releases touting their successes. The lawyer retraining group even crowed about the "excellent accounts in *The Boston Globe* and other papers" that its announcements received. But the very profession that was publishing those stories was simultaneously refusing to hire or help retrain its own persecuted colleagues. ■

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# The Embrace of Principled Stands

During the civil rights era, a few newspaper owners, editors and reporters risked their lives and livelihoods by supporting Supreme Court rulings and desegregation.

By Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff

**B**uford Boone's years as an FBI agent introduced him to fear, but nothing like he felt when he climbed the stairs inside the Tuscaloosa courthouse in January 1957 to face a seething, racist mob of white men and women. Boone—who had returned to his first career, newspapers, and become editor and publisher of The Tuscaloosa News—had taken a strong and overwhelmingly unpopular stand that the University of Alabama ought to enroll and protect its first black student, Autherine Lucy. And he had decried the thugs who swarmed on campus and tried to attack her as she headed toward classes.

Now he was about to encounter the West Alabama Citizens' Council, which had enough clout to gain use of a courtroom for their meeting. He had been invited to explain his position. Then he had been uninvited—out of concern that he would be physically attacked.

He went anyway. In spite of the hissing and jeering, he started talking. "It is not the easiest speaking assignment I ever have accepted," he said. "But I believe the problem of segregation and integration is one that needs to be discussed rationally, fully and intelligently."

He added, "I believe the Supreme Court decision had to come and was morally right." The mocking continued, accompanied by a threat to throw him out the window. But he kept talking. "Nothing in it is inconsistent with my conception of democracy ...."<sup>1</sup>

## Risks Worth Taking

Boone, who held his own and survived the night, was one of a small group of liberal and moderate Southern editors, probably no more than 20 at any one time, who risked the anger of their readers as well as circulation and advertiser boycotts to urge compliance with the

newspaper suffered severe circulation drops and lost an amount equivalent to \$13 million today. But they didn't alter their views a bit.

The owners of the main black newspaper in town, the Arkansas State Press, lost even more. In 1950, when Ebony magazine asked black editors to write the headline they most wanted

to see in their newspapers, L.C. and Daisy Bates wrote the most ambitious of them all: "South Abolishes All Jim Crow." They wrote their newspaper—and in her advocate's role, Daisy ran the local NAACP and led the nine black students who integrated Central High School—with the same gutsy ambition. They remained bold

even as their national advertising base disappeared. They kept the paper on life support until 1959, when it finally gave out and died.

Some editors responded fearlessly to brutality. L. Alex Wilson was highly respected and influential in the black community and among white politicians and professionals in Memphis, where he was editor of the *Tri-State Defender*, a black weekly. But on the streets of Little Rock, where he and three other black journalists walked toward Central High, the lanky, impeccably dressed editor was treated with the indignity of a slave. Surrounded by a scrum of angry white men, he was taunted, slapped and pushed to the ground. He rose, quietly retrieved his hat, and tried to walk forward when he was kicked repeatedly from behind.

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**Surrounded by a scrum of angry white men, [the editor] was taunted, slapped and pushed to the ground. He rose, quietly retrieved his hat, and tried to walk forward when he was kicked repeatedly from behind. Then a man leapt onto his back, put him in a stranglehold and smashed him on the head.**

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Supreme Court's school desegregation decisions of 1954 and 1955. Reporters and photographers, too, braved mobs, bottles, bricks and gunfire to report on the civil rights struggle. They painted a picture of white supremacist and segregationist excesses that American voters, ultimately, could not ignore.

Many editors were not even integrationists, or didn't start out that way. They urged little more than compliance with the law. But they paid a heavy price even for that stand. During the Central High School desegregation crisis in Little Rock in 1957, Harry Ashmore and J.N. Heiskell, editor and owner of the *Arkansas Gazette*, editorialized, sometimes on the front page, that the national interest must prevail over regionalism and that the Supreme Court must be obeyed to avert anarchy. Their

<sup>1</sup> Boone's entire speech was published in *Nieman Reports* in July 1957.

Then a man leapt onto his back, put him in a stranglehold and smashed him on the head.

Wilson's revenge came in his refusal to break. He picked himself up every time he was knocked down, he increased his hat every time it was crumpled, and he walked without assistance to his car. Through it all, he kept the middle button of his suit coat fastened. But he was never the same after that. He suffered physical after-shocks that contributed to his death three years later at age 51.

In north Mississippi, Hazel Brannon Smith watched the financial health of the Lexington Advertiser decline precipitously after she protested the sheriff's shooting of a black man for making too much noise. The boycotts against her paper increased in intensity when she editorially attacked the white Citizens' Council. Her husband was fired from his job as a hospital administrator. She didn't back down.

Ira Harkey, Jr., editor and publisher of the Pascagoula Chronicle in Mississippi, became a pariah in his town. His offense? He opposed Governor Ross Barnett's stop-at-nothing approach to preventing the desegregation of the University of Mississippi. A bullet pierced the door of his newspaper. A shotgun blasted out a window of his home. A cross was burned on his lawn. "Ah, autumn!" Harkey wrote. "Falling leaves ... the smell of burning crosses in the air..."

## The Power of Words

Humor often proved to be the only antidote and best bond among the dissident editors. Two of the most courageous were father and son, Hodding Carter, Jr. and Hodding Carter III of The Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Mississippi. [See Hodding Carter III's article on page 90.] They never lost their ability to laugh or their sense of outrage at racial injustice, particularly the organized brand published by the Citizens' Councils.

When a local jury took 24 minutes to ignore all evidence and acquit a sheriff of murder in the death of a black inmate, Hodding Carter, Jr. spoofed the prevail-

ing sentiment among whites: "What with all these nosey newspapermen and preachers and Yankees and other such communistic trash, it's getting to where a Mississippi white man can't kill himself a niggah without getting his name in the papers and losing up to two or three days in court. Downright subversive, we call it, and something ought to be done. Otherwise, what was the use of us winning the war for Southern independence?"

After Carter wrote an article for Look magazine detailing the menacing spread of the Citizens' Councils, the article was branded on the floor of the Mississippi House of Representatives "a willful lie [by] a nigger loving editor." The House censured Carter.

Carter's front-page editorial response was a classic. "By a vote of 89 to 19 the Mississippi House of Representatives has resolved the editor of this newspaper into a liar because of an article I wrote .... If this charge were true it would make me well qualified to serve with that body. It is not true. So to even things up I herewith resolve by a vote of 1 to 0 that there are 89 liars in the State Legislature .... I am hopeful that this fever like the Ku Kluxism which rose from the same kind of infection, will run its course before too long a time. Meanwhile those 89 character mobbers can go to hell collectively or singly and wait there until I back down. They needn't plan on returning." [The entire editorial appears on page 91.]

When it became popular among racists to refer to Atlanta Constitution editor Ralph McGill as "Rastus Ralph," McGill fought back. He named his little dog Rastus and trained it to bark whenever a telephone receiver was pointed at it. Thereafter, when he received harassing telephone calls at home, McGill would say, "So you want to speak to Rastus," and point the receiver at the dog. The dog would bark away.

Reporters, frequently dispatched to cover stories in unsafe outposts of hostile people, were under constant threat. French reporter Paul Guihard was shot to death on the University of Mississippi campus in 1962; others were attacked, some viciously, as

they moved from Southern dateline to Southern dateline. Claude Sitton of The New York Times and Karl Fleming of Newsweek, who set the standard for reporters covering the movement, learned to operate strategically for survival. They saw that if they took a steno pad, cut it in two and put one in the inside breast pocket of their suit coat, it couldn't be seen by the mobs. And if they put both inside the pocket, the mobs might think they were hiding a shoulder holster and mistake them for FBI agents.

There may never have been a time in our nation's history when more journalistic courage was shown than in the civil rights era of the 1950's, 60's and 70's. The presence of Southern editors willing to display dissent against rising mob madness emboldened national leaders—presidents, congresses, religious figures, corporate executives and, especially, black civil rights leaders—to press for change. The bravery of reporters and photographers drove them to penetrate the South to see firsthand—and, more importantly, to show—the raw grip of white supremacy on an entire region of the country.

The journalistic boldness, in turn, made the nation more courageous as it spoke up against injustice and transformed civil rights from a movement to a national imperative. ■

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# The Difficult Isolation Courage Can Bring

Newspaper boycotts forced ‘the need for courage beyond the physical . . .’

By Hodding Carter III

If you grew up a white man in the last great American frontier that was the Deep South in the first half of the 20th century, courage was well understood. It was not a matter of cerebration. It was the instinct that impelled a man to fight rather than to run. For the most part, it was understood to be physical at its core. Those who demonstrated it were respected, if not necessarily loved. Those who flunked the test were held in contempt, or treated as beneath it.

But there was another great cultural leitmotif for the Southern white. Conformity to the code of white supremacy was a supreme value and enforced by all means necessary. Those who deviated, or seemed to deviate, from unblinking commitment to “our way of life,” were outside the dominant society’s pale. At times, not even silence was enough to prove loyalty. You had to prove it by word and deed. “If you’re not with us, you’re against us” was an implicit slogan.

Whites treasured what my Dad translated from Sir Walter Scott as the “broadsword virtues.” The values of the clan came first. The approbation of the clan was treasured. Isolation from it, expulsion for violating its precepts, was tantamount to spiritual death.

Against that background, and the reemergence of black Southerners as actors rather than victims, running a Mississippi newspaper that questioned racist verities was an invitation to black-balling, economic pressure, physical violence and—potentially rather than ever in fact—death. As the civil rights movement began to crest and the federal government stirred from its 80-plus years of moral slumber, white Mississippi—first my Dad’s and then mine—reacted like a baited bear. Its aim was to repel the outsider, punish the white dissenter, and shove the black



Hodding Carter, Jr., editor and publisher of *The Delta Democrat-Times*, in the 1940’s.

man back into the ditch.

This was the environment in which Dad founded and ran his small town daily for 21 years, with time off for World War II, and I for the next 15. He had come to Greenville, in Mississippi’s Delta, in 1936. The men who backed him, most notably the planter-poet William Alexander Percy, had no reason to believe they were subsidizing a traitor to the white race. His racial views were Southern orthodox.

But his intellectual drive was not, nor were his moral values. He broke the mold early by printing Jesse Owens’ picture in the paper—the depiction of the great Olympic runner—breaking the taboo against showing the black man as anything but clown or criminal. When he began to use the honorific “Mrs.” in his *Delta Democrat-Times* to describe black as well as white married women,

he broke another. Black women were “girls,” or Sally, or nigger.

As a result, even before World War II, he had need for the courage instilled in him by his courageous father, an unblinking segregationist who never backed off from a fight in his tiny Louisiana town. When threatened, Dad threatened back. When warned not to say or do something, he said or did it. Face-to-face was a preferred mode of disagreement. And he filled his home and his office with guns, letting everyone know that he had them close at hand and that killing could be a two-way street.

## Speaking for Change

But if Dad broke the Southern code of conformity, he did not do it as a revolutionary. His was an evolutionary

journey. He never became what any self-respecting Northern liberal would have called an integrationist. He spoke for the South in scores of articles that alternated their loving depiction of Southern virtues with condemnation of its most blatant and inhuman excesses. He spoke for change, but organic and slow rather than legalistic and fast.

Slow or fast, it was too much for the white majority. A Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for 12 editorials he wrote stressing the need for racial tolerance and respect in the wake of the war against fascism did nothing to swing that majority to his side. Then, in the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court's school desegregation decision he had warned against, he wrote that it had been decided on decidedly American grounds and stepped outside the magic circle for good. With two *Look* magazine articles condemning the newly founded white Citizens' Council as an "uptown Ku Klux Klan," the war was joined for real. Full-scale economic and circulation boycotts thereafter kept *The Delta Democrat-Times* isolated within the borders of Greenville's Washington County; he was condemned by the Mississippi legislature.

This is when the need for courage beyond the physical came in. Dad was a Southerner through and through. He wanted to be loved by his fellow white Southerners. The condemnation, the boycotts, the incessant nighttime threatening phone calls were all hard to take. Harder, however, was the sense of isolation from the conforming majority. He spoke ever more vigorously, and he suffered ever more intensely from the hate and scorn of his clansmen. It took a fearsome toll.

They never actually came for him or, later, for me. There was a sense out there that he was a dangerous man, a physical man whom a person would have to kill to silence. No one actually took me for Dad, but I did all

I could to encourage comparisons. From the time I returned to Greenville from the Marines until 1964, a pistol was always in my car, in my pocket, in my office desk, and at my bedside. There were places in the Delta I had better sense than to go at night, but I

she was often frantically worried in private.

Here is the lesson I learned early from that clash of courage with cultural conformity I witnessed at such close quarters for so long. Real courage consists of looking your fear in the eye, then soldiering on. Dad was afraid much of the time. I was afraid much of the time, too, from my assumption of editorial control in 1962 until the moment when white Mississippi had to accept the reality that lone editors were not the problem and that "second reconstruction" was not going to lead to "second redemption." By then, Dad was dead and I was on my way to Jimmy Carter's Washington, D.C. and a new life.

It's an old lesson, but too often unlearned or forgotten. Mortal men and women set course, encounter adversity, are terrified—and press on. Not gods or superheroes—mere men and women. The enemy can be as determined and vicious and lethal as the white racists of Mississippi a half-century and less ago—or even worse or even less. What is required, what Dad showed me, is that you suck up your gut and do the best

you can.

It's an old lesson, but its application by Betty and Hodding Carter in one Mississippi Delta town during the time when "never-ever" gave way now remains the most important of my life. ■

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In 1955, Carter responded to the state legislature's censure of him with a front-page editorial.

refused to hunker down and withdraw from the larger society, just as he and Mother had lived a full social life in their hometown.

It helps to have a companion in courage if that is what the situation requires, and Mother was that, as well as charming, disarming and conciliatory with all and sundry. She had not been raised for such a life. A French major at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, at 23 she was suddenly thrust into the uncharted waters of crusader's wife when Dad started an anti-Huey Long tabloid daily in his Louisiana hometown in 1933. That was war enough, though never as intense as the one to come. Serene in public,

# Editorial Pages: Why Courage Is Hard to Find

The Star Tribune published strong editorials about Bush administration truth telling when few other papers did, and an editor there explores some reasons why.

By Jim Boyd

I love what the word “newspaperman”—or “newspaperwoman”—implies: someone who knows a lot but lacks pretension; someone who knows how to take names and is unafraid of kicking backsides; someone who knows truth will prove elusive but is damn determined to pursue it. The quintessential newspaperman for me was the late Lars-Erik Nelson. He wrote for the *New York Daily News* and did his best backside kicking in, of all places, *The New York Review of Books*. No one escaped his verbal scalpel if they deserved it, including *The New York Times*’s treatment of nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee. I really miss him.

That kind of journalistic courage is difficult to find today. I’m not talking about physical courage, which many good journalists display daily in Iraq and other dangerous places. I’m talking mental toughness, willingness to risk. We have very few Nelsons, few I.F. Stones, few David Halberstams and Neil Sheehans. People I consider courageous are Murray Waas at the *National Journal*; Dan Froomkin at [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) and [nieman-watchdog.org](http://nieman-watchdog.org); Warren Strobel and several of his colleagues at the Knight Ridder Washington bureau (soon to be the McClatchy Washington bureau); Walter Pincus and Dana Priest of the *Post*. And, of course, Helen Thomas.

But it remains an exclusive list. The Bush administration arguably combines the worst elements of the Nixon, Johnson and Hoover administrations in one. And yet most of the mainstream press has handled it with kid gloves, most powerfully on Iraq. For me, the entire problem was captured in Vice President Dick Cheney’s appearance on “Meet the Press” in September 2003. Cheney fed Tim Russert one lie and

half-truth after another. The next day, editorial writers at every newspaper in the country had enough material (easily available) to do an extended truth-telling editorial. In my newspaper, the *Star Tribune*, a devastating critique filled the entire editorial column. No other paper did anything similar, though Cheney came in for sharp criticism on some of the better blogs.

Why were we, in Minneapolis, the only ones in the mainstream media to make an effort at calling Cheney’s words to account? I’m not sure I know, but when the Downing Street memo hit the British press, we again devoted most of an op-ed page to printing its full text. To my knowledge, we were the only paper to do that. Why? Again, not sure I know, but the list is lengthy of truth-telling editorials and op-ed pieces that can be found pretty much exclusively on our pages.

Doing this was uncomfortable. Right-wing bloggers took after us with all barrels blasting. Radio host Hugh Hewitt attempted to get our readers to cancel their subscriptions. A United States senator warned folks above my pay grade (as deputy editorial page editor) that we were becoming a laughingstock in Washington. My publisher, concerned with the same sort of circulation problems confronting almost every newspaper, was extremely uneasy, as were his bosses at McClatchy corporate headquarters in Sacramento. We felt besieged.

From my perch in the Midwest, I’ve tried to develop several explanations for the lack of courage I’ve seen displayed on so many editorial pages and in so many news sections:

**1. Newt Gingrich’s strategy worked.** His kind just kept throwing that label

“liberal” at us until we got spooked. It began to sound like the “N” word. Whenever we printed an opinion or reported facts that were uncomplimentary to the administration, we’d get that label thrown at us. So we backed off generally. And when we did get into controversial waters, we used the old “on-the-one-hand, on-the-other” approach: Three sources said the sun will rise tomorrow. Reached for comment, an administration source said it wouldn’t. You make up your mind.

**2. Access.** With the Washington press corps, my view from afar suggests many have sold pieces of their journalistic souls for access. They so value getting the good stuff from people like Scooter Libby and Karl Rove that they dare not do anything—including good journalism—that would put that access in jeopardy. The means become the end.

**3. Comfort and celebrity.** Life’s good, the money flows freely, the chance to rub elbows with the in-crowd is sweet. So you become some version of (name any cable news anchor): inane, dense and willing to invest great energy in the story of who killed a blue-eyed white girl on spring break.

**4. Economics.** This is the one that really pains me. Wall Street demands that newspapers make obscene profits; if they don’t, their share price will drop, and soon the corporate offices will be redecorated for someone new. As I write, final touches are being applied to the deal that will see Knight Ridder disappear, most of it into McClatchy, which owns the *Star Tribune*. It stinks that one greedy geezer could force Knight Ridder out of existence be-

cause it wasn't making enough profit for him. With the nation politically polarized, with Newt's "liberal media" message deeply embedded in conservative heads, with readership declining (cause or effect?), corporate leaders in media companies want above all to avoid offending people. Their bias toward the local, the cute, the non-controversial isn't ideological; it's a pocketbook issue.

**5. Reasonableness.** Editorial writers like to engage on the level of reason. But that doesn't work when you are dealing with ideologues to whom reason is an inconvenience. They ignore it. In some circumstances, to be effective an editorial writer must get down in the muck and have it out, which means being willing to talk truth to power in blunt and, on occasion, ungentlemanly

terms. It doesn't always feel good to do that, but it is necessary.

I don't know what's to become of our beloved craft, so critical to the proper functioning of democracy. As individuals, we can't control that. But what we can control is the stiffness in our spines. More of us must begin to demonstrate real journalistic courage, and that means going after what is true no matter how uncomfortable this pursuit becomes for those in power or for us.

To do this, we need support from those who believe as we do in the value of truth-seeking journalism. At the Star Tribune, last year we won an award from The American Academy of Diplomacy, which is this nation's leading diplomatic establishment, for our forceful editorializing on Bush

administration foreign policy. In its citation, the academy recognized our exhaustive research, our willingness to tell truth to power, and our dedication to nonpartisanship. The academy was saying we done good. It was a gutsy thing to say. Wherever journalists demonstrate courage, we need folks like the members of the academy, willing to stand up and say, unequivocally, "Well done, newspaperman." ■

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## Risking Relationships as a Measure of Courage

'Questioning the reasons for the war meant not only going against the President's policy but against the beliefs of many people I knew and respected.'

By Sheryl McCarthy

**W**hen U.S. newspaper columnists analyze and make judgments about people, issues and events, the job rarely, if ever, entails dodging bullets or the state authorities, or being threatened with the loss of a job. So what does courage look like in our line of work? Is it courageous when we wage crusades on issues of importance that are largely neglected by those who should shoulder responsibility and by the rest of the press? Or is it part of what we do in taking unpopular stands on controversial issues? Or can it be found in the work we do in holding the powerful accountable? Certainly, a measure of courage is sometimes evident but, since this work is what columnists do, doing it doesn't necessarily make any of us courageous.

Columnists show courage when—

based on reporting and judgment—they write what they know will alienate them from the people and environments that usually sustain them. Writing such words can put columnists at odds with people who have, until now, shared similar political beliefs. Or it can fracture connections with the members of their racial or ethnic group, or with their colleagues and social acquaintances. Judgments a columnist reaches and writes about can sometimes, too, put her in deep conflict with religious and moral values on which she was raised and possibly risk the severing of family ties.

In their expression of opinion, columns are propelled by ego and personality. Paid to stand above the fray, we hurl observations and judgments at the public, presumably for their edification. Regarded often as people

who think ourselves wiser than those we write about—and better informed than those who disagree with us—we appear thick-skinned and impervious to criticism. Not so, since like everyone else, most of us, at least, want respect, with a little affection mixed in. Usually we get this respect and affection from those who believe in what we espouse. So when we risk taking positions that we have pretty good reason to know will earn us disapproval from these people, one word comes to mind for the decision to push ahead. That word is courage.

What follows are a few courageous moments that stand out:

**In the aftermath of 9/11:** After 9/11, a columnist disputed the need for Americans to know the reason for the attacks. The terrorists' motives didn't

interest him, he declared. All he cared about was that the people responsible were hunted down and punished. His column reflected the mood of the nation. But columnists needed to ask the question, “Why do they hate us?” and to offer more than President Bush’s glib answer, “They hate us because we love freedom.” It was important for Americans, filled as they were with grief and anger, to try to understand—without excusing the attacks—how some of our country’s policies have given people from other cultures a reason to despise us. Refusal to confront this dynamic could result in future attacks. The few columnists who raised questions of this kind were branded unpatriotic by the administration, a charge echoed by their readers. It was a difficult time to endure such a backlash.

**In the walk-up to the Iraq War:** When columnists questioned the threat Saddam Hussein posed to the United States prior to the invasion—as I did in columns I wrote at *Newsday*—outraged e-mails and letters arrived in bulk, even as a few readers agreed. My naivete was questioned by many, including a former congressman and mayor whom I respected. My view about the impending war ran contrary to that held by many of my friends and colleagues, some of whom became apoplectic as I wrote and argued this perspective. For columnists, words we speak among friends only get amplified when we publish them, too. Questioning the reasons for the war meant not only going against the President’s policy but against the beliefs of many people I knew and respected.

**When black columnists reject “black” arguments:** Black journalists often approach their work believing they have an obligation to “think and write black.” This expectation is shared by many in the black community. But this means embracing a philosophy of blacks as victims that blames white people and institutionalized racism for most social

and economic problems facing our community. Most black columnists I know routinely acknowledge the impact that racism has on African Americans, but we are characterized as “not being black” and criticized as “blaming the victim” when we go on to suggest that aspects of black culture play a role in impeding progress when we write

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**Columnists show courage when—based on reporting and judgment—they write what they know will alienate them from the people and environments that usually sustain them.**

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about insufficient respect for education, the glorification of street culture, entrenched sexism, or attitudes about sex and reproduction. Rejecting the “black line” by acknowledging that many solutions can be controlled by us represents courage.

**By supporting highly unpopular, but worthy causes:** Inspired by some tragic cases in New York and New Mexico, I wrote several columns urging more compassionate treatment by the criminal justice system of domestic violence victims—women and children—who kill their batterers after enduring years of horrendous and traumatic abuse. In other columns I criticized state prison systems for charging inmates excessive rates to make phone calls to their families. And I took on the highly inflammatory press coverage given to some high-profile murder cases in which suspects were essentially tried and convicted in the press. Media overkill, aided by police leaks, could lead to serious miscarriages of justice, I argued, while at the same time acknowledging that these were unsympathetic defendants who might well have committed horrible crimes. With virtually no public sympathy for these issues (sometimes only outright hostility) and probably little likelihood that words like mine will make any dif-

ference, to write them requires a very thick skin, if not courage.

**In questioning one’s core values:** Columnist Jimmy Breslin comes to mind. Raised an Irish Catholic, he used his New York columns to criticize the Catholic Church for its practices—its insistence that priests remain celibate, its edicts against birth control, and the institutional arrogance and insularity that allowed sex abuse by priests to go unchecked for decades. His sizeable ego probably anesthetizes him against the approbation of his fellow church members, but in his willingness to challenge the validity of the moral precepts of his religion, he’s been a courageous role model for me and, I suspect,

other columnists. When I argued that “under God” could be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance without destroying the moral underpinnings of the country, my column was reprinted in my hometown newspaper. My deeply religious mother read it, we quarreled, and then didn’t speak to each other for months. She didn’t see the columns I’ve written supporting abortion rights and criticizing the church’s wrong-headed push for abstinence-only education for teenagers. I’m grateful for that, though I would have written what I wrote even if I’d known she would.

These small, daily moments of courage cannot be compared with the life-threatening risks that journalists face in countries where reporting and opinion-writing can result in them being fired from their job, jailed, beaten, murdered or forced into exile. But they do pose risks to many of the relationships we value most. In their willingness to take such risks—as many columnists do—our courage gets measured. ■

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# A Local Newspaper Endures a Stormy Backlash

‘We had the opportunity to tell the story of powerless people who’d been hurt by powerful people who counted on the public never learning what they’d done.’

By Dean Miller

Some days we felt like one of those plucky anglers in a small boat who solidly hooks a halibut, only to be beaten to death by the thrashing brutewhen it’s hauled aboard. The Post Register is a wee dory of a newspaper: With 26,000 daily circulation, it’s not buoyed by any corporate chain and has an opinion page often reviled in this livid corner of reddest Idaho for its reliable dissent.

Last year, by exposing Boy Scout pedophiles and those who failed to kick them out of the scouting program, we energized three of our community’s big forces against us, including those most able to punish our newspaper—the community’s majority religion, the richest guys in town, and the conservative machine that controls Idaho.

First came the tip: A pedophile caught at a local scout camp in 1997 had no had two victims, as we reported at the time; he had dozens. When we went to the courthouse to look for the civil suit filed by these victims, the clerks (and the computers) said there was no such case. We later learned that the national Boy Scouts of America and its local Grand Teton Council had hired two of Idaho’s best-connected law firms to seal the files and hide what came to be known as the Brad Stowell case.

The Post Register went to court in late 2004, and by January 2005 we’d dragged the case file into the light of day and read it from beginning to end. Turns out that as early as 1991 scout leaders had been warned about Stowell; they hired him again anyway. Top-level local and national leaders of the Mormon Church, which sponsors almost all Grand Teton Council scout troops, had also been warned, but to no effect. From these files we learned

that while under investigation Stowell confessed his problem to his bishop in 1988 and had been sent to church counselors for sex abuser treatment. Seven years later, this bishop told scout executives he knew of no reason Stowell should not be a scout camp leader. The files also showed lawyers for the Boy Scout organization knew about more victims, but never told those boys’ parents. The victims were probably asleep at the time, one lawyer said, and even if not, it was a bad memory best ignored.

In February 2005, the Post Register launched a six-day series. The first day’s story featured 14-year-old camper, Adam Steed, who forced adult leaders to call the cops on Stowell. Steed was the son of a Mormon seminary teacher and a cinch to become an Eagle Scout. But he’d quit scouting and school; instead of being praised for his efforts to stop Stowell from harming others, scout leaders and fellow scouts had shunned him for bringing down this man whom they described as charming and accomplished.

## The Backlash Begins

Rank-and-file church members were among the first to complain: “Are you a Christian?” a woman in her 70’s hissed across the newsroom conference table at me Monday morning, as she quoted from scripture.

Why had the paper dredged up this story, she wanted to know.

“The rest of the boys want justice,” I replied.

“Tell ’em to get over it,” she snarled. “Just tell ’em ‘tough!’”

If hers represented the voice of our community, stormy weather was

ahead. Though our stories were aimed at decisions made by the Grand Teton Council (which at 30,000 members is bigger than our newspaper’s readership), some Mormon church members characterized our coverage as an attack on their faith. “The Church,” as it’s known here, dominates eastern Idaho even more than it does Salt Lake City. Some counties that our newspaper serves are more than 70 percent Mormon, and for generations scouting has been the official youth program for Mormon boys. More than 90 percent of the troops in our local Grand Teton Council are sponsored by Mormon congregations.

For four generations, the Post Register has been controlled by the Brady family, Irish Catholics, and Democrats, so there are readers who imagine liberal papists on every beat. They are encouraged in this belief by some local politicians and businessmen who benefit from making the paper Mormon Republicans’ straw man. Even with careful editing to preserve only germane mentions of religious affiliation, we knew that some talk-radio hosts would start banging the “Post Register is anti-Mormon” drums.

The drums banged, and we were flooded with calls and e-mails and letters to the editor from readers who told us that holding the Grand Teton Council accountable was Mormon-bashing. We responded to every call, letter and e-mail we received. The backlash came from advertisers, too. One of our big advertising accounts, a man who runs a furniture store, demanded an explanation and angrily informed me Stowell was a fine young man wrongly accused. Other advertisers just cancelled their ads, vowing never to return.

It's one thing to lose an account when you're an employee. It's quite another when you're also a stockholder; 140 employees hold close to 49 percent of the company's stock. For many families, this is their retirement. Many of them have been scouts or scout leaders, and at least a third are Mormon. Even non-newsroom staff were catching heat about the series at church gatherings and scout meetings. Even so, throughout this time most of what I heard inside our building were words of support.

With each additional day of the series, economic pressure built. Publisher Roger Plothow wrote an open letter to readers in which he criticized scout executives' decisions and said these stories were a victory for open public records. He was unapologetic and reminded readers he grew up Mormon and proudly claims the rank of Eagle Scout. A lot of what is popularly called courage is simple integrity. Plothow, by standing up with a stoic and clear-eyed defense, spoke for us, but also for the values of journalism.

### Attacks Get Personal

One month after the series ran, Stowell, who had served a brief jail term for his scout camp predations, violated his parole and was sent to prison for two to 14 years. Around this same time, Grand Teton Council staff had been telling volunteers/scoutmasters that the stories were all lies cobbled together by a gay reporter on a vendetta against the Boy Scouts. Our reporter, Peter Zuckerman, was not "out" to anyone but family, a few colleagues at the paper (including me), and his close friends. When the magnitude of the story became evident, I vetted him thoroughly, making sure he had not been active in the debate over gay scouts and had not been kicked out of a troop.

Peter's personal life and the series itself went under the microscope in June when a local multimillionaire, Frank VanderSloot, began buying full-page critical ads in our Sunday paper. He devoted several paragraphs to establishing that Zuckerman is gay. He

noted the Mormon Church opposes gay marriage and that the Boy Scouts no longer allow gay men to lead troops, but briefly added: "We think it would be very unfair for anyone to conclude that is what is behind Zuckerman's motives."

Strangers started ringing Peter's



A local businessman, Frank VanderSloot, bought full-page ads to criticize the paper's reporting on the Boy Scout story.

doorbell at midnight. His partner of five years was fired from his job. Despite the harassment, Peter kept coming to work and chasing down leads on other pedophiles in the Grand Teton Council, while continuing to cover his courts and cops beat. I spoke at his church one Sunday and meant it when I said that I hope my son grows into as much of a man as Peter had.

The local Boy Scout executive had declared Stowell was the only child molester he'd discovered in the Grand Teton Council. But by midsummer, the paper was hunting for documentation on a dozen leaders whom victims and

their families had identified to us as pedophiles. Meanwhile, the Post Register kept on printing VanderSloot's ads, even when they included serious mischaracterizations, errors of fact, and glaring omissions, such as the fact that the Boy Scouts' national staffer in charge of youth protection had just pleaded guilty to trading in child pornography. VanderSloot said his ads, which he labeled "The Community Page," were intended to bolster people who were too scared of the mighty Post Register to speak up.

But no one who was named in our articles asked for a correction, retraction or clarification. They couldn't and still had not a year later. The stories were based on information in deposition transcripts found in the secret lawsuit file. Not satisfied with the impact of his ads, VanderSloot demanded a debate. Insiders had warned us not to pick fights with VanderSloot. He owns an international multilevel marketing/health products company, Melaleuca, Inc., and often threatens to start a rival newspaper. But we felt we couldn't run away from this challenge, so we agreed to two half-hour debates on a local TV station.

A few minutes into the debate it became clear to me that VanderSloot had not, as I had, read the entire case file or even the most significant depositions. Broad assertions that had been prepared for him by a young lawyer fell apart in the face of details from the court record. The day after the first debate aired, the Post Register published documentation that at least two other pedophiles had preyed on Grand Teton Council scouts, including a vicious child rapist who had been reported to the Grand Teton Council in the 1980's, convicted in Utah, and was now back at work for the council. Two weeks later, we documented another pedophile in the council. In this case, his criminal file had been sealed and hidden.

By now the paper had secured evidence of four recent pedophiles in the local scout council, about as many documented cases as the 500,000-member Catholic diocese of Boston

when that scandal erupted in The Boston Globe.

## Losing the Company President's Support

Full-page VanderSloot ads kept arriving—a half dozen in all. The last declared victory. His words weren't hurting our circulation—which was rising—but we were growing tired of the smear campaign. VanderSloot did score a victory in the fall. In the September 23rd Post Register, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brady published an open letter headlined with Will Rogers' quip: "The only thing wrong with Boy Scouts is there aren't enough of them." Brady recited a litany of the benefits of scouting, pledged his and his wife's support, and said "We regret any negativity that might be associated with the great Boy Scouts organization ... the entire community should support the scouts."

Brady is the president of the Post Company and serves as chairman of its board. Religion, "big" money, and the conservative movement's rabid protection of local scout leaders had gotten to our boss.

Now the newsroom was really on its own as we started to cover the lobbying campaign of Paul Steed, father of the boy who forced the Grand Teton Council to turn Stowell over to the cops. The elder Steed had quit his Mormon Church job to push for changes in Idaho law. He was the kind of divisive force that Brady scolded in his campaign ad. But then Idaho surprised us. When the Republican-dominated legislature convened in January, a sympathetic legislator introduced the Steed family's proposal. A flinching and at times tearful house committee heard the awful stories in testimony from the wounded boys and their parents. The lawmakers unanimously voted to do away with the statute of limitations on child molestation, and the governor signed the bill into law with the Steeds and Jeff Bird, another scout victim, standing by. The house committee chairman wrote to the Grand Teton Council to ask why its leader had not been fired.

## What Courage Means

Judges called the Post Register's coverage of this story "courageous" when they awarded it the Scripps Howard First Amendment prize. That's a hard word for those of us at the paper to wear comfortably. After all, we'd wit-



The Post Register's front page on the second day of its six-day series.

nessed the courage of Adam Steed and his younger brother, Ben, and Jeff Bird when, as grown men, they went public in the paper and revealed humiliating details of what had been done to them at scout camp. Even now, we fear for them and their families, as VanderSloot's full-page attack ads continue.

But was what any of us did courageous? With no corporate bankroll to fall back on and coping with the pressures any newspaper publisher faces today, our publisher, Roger Plothow, took lonely risks to uphold the principle of open government. In doing so, he gave victims the opportunity they

needed to speak out against those who had harmed them. By his example, Plothow stiffened the spines of minority stockholders (many of whom are staff members at the paper), who stood firm.

Laboring in obscurity, and without resources their peers at larger papers have, community journalists often end up dreaming small. But my 34 colleagues at the Post Register—in particular the cadre of editors who have worked together for a decade and lead a largely entry-level staff—refused to pull back in the face of much opposition. They were dogged in their work until the victims' stories—and the aftermath of their telling—were complete. Peter Zuckerman, in particular, persevered despite repeated threats that were inflamed by a carefully orchestrated ad hominem attack on him and his work.

One of the sweeter moments of our year occurred when we received figures from our circulation audit. While the sales numbers of other U.S. newspapers were in free fall, we were among the nation's faster growing daily papers. For us, these numbers testified to the value of fortitude.

Publishing uncomfortable truths needn't be an act of hot-blooded courage; it should be a cool-headed exercise in focus: Find the civic heart of a story, steer a steady course to it, and serve the public's legitimate interests in openness and justice. Do that and, even when the story rocks your boat, trust that the waves won't capsize it. ■

*Dean Miller is managing editor of the Post Register in Idaho Falls, Idaho. This series of articles, "Scouts' Honor," is online at [www.postregister.com/scouts\\_honor/index.php](http://www.postregister.com/scouts_honor/index.php). For his work on this series, Peter Zuckerman won the Livingston Award in the category of local reporting, a prize recognizing the nation's best journalists under the age of 35.*

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# Courage: What Network News Needs Now

‘Network news spent decades establishing its solid credentials. Now is no time for it to lose its nerve.’

By Bill Wheatley

**F**aced with vigorous new competition and declining revenues, network television news is increasingly behaving as though oblivion is only a few fiscal quarters away. Short-term profit is trumping long-term viability. Compromise is defeating consistency. Courage—acting boldly in the face of adversity—is in short supply.

While the news divisions of the major broadcast networks are moving energetically into the digital age—creating Web sites, Podcasts, news programs for cell phones—they are reducing the journalistic quality on which they have built their reputations. Budgets have been cut, talented people have been let go and, inevitably, good journalism has suffered. Worse, some of their programs are tilting toward the tabloid, softening their standards and blurring the lines between news and entertainment. The irony is, of course, that in doing this the networks are likely hastening the very decline they are trying so hard to avoid.

TV networks are businesses, so generating profits and pleasing shareholders is a must. But even with shrinking revenues, network news is likely to produce profits for years to come. Why would the people who run the networks endanger those profits by weakening their news programs? And why would they put at risk the integrity of the very brand names they are counting on to propel them into a successful digital future?

The networks could, of course, live with lower profits on the not unreasonable theory that better journalism would, at least, keep profits flowing. But taking a stance requiring that kind of courage isn't likely in today's Darwinian corporate environment.

If lower profits won't do, it is all the more important that some brave leaders step forward and get their networks moving in the right direction. Instead of reading their obituaries, they need to apply to their traditional businesses the drive and creativity that they are showing in their new ones. They must insist on excellence. And though it may seem counterintuitive, they should be concentrating on expansion rather than contraction.

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## Short-term profit is trumping long-term viability.

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There are ideas—some aging well with time—just waiting for resolute souls to champion them. Let me list a few:

**Expand the half-hour evening newscasts to an hour.** There certainly wouldn't be any shortage of important content. The one-hour programs would have more stories, deeper reporting, perhaps even time for interviews and guest commentary. Added costs would be modest. To help persuade affiliates to surrender the airtime, the networks could offer them some of the commercial slots in the added half-hour.

**Create better news programs in prime time.** With the exception of “60 Minutes,” prime-time newsmagazines are no longer attracting sizeable audiences. In a tacky and so far unsuccessful attempt to get back in the game, most of them have moved down-market, focusing largely on crime and sex. The networks can do better. It's time for their best people to come up with new and worthy approaches.

**Put real news back into morning news programs.** Pushed out by “lifestyle” reports, celebrity features, and thinly disguised promotions for network entertainment programs and other corporate priorities, real news needs to be put back in. No one expects the morning programs to deal only with news, but in their drive to maximize audiences the producers have minimized what viewers want and need: well-reported stories about topics that really matter.

**Get back into radio.** Though the three broadcast networks are in radio, their news efforts are now so modest (mostly hourly summaries and occasional special reports) that many Americans are probably not aware of it. National Public Radio (NPR) news programs attract tens of millions of listeners each week with a blend of reportage, interviews and features. NPR has demonstrated that there's a sizable audience for serious news on the radio. It's time for one or more of the networks to go after it.

**Quality is key to all of this.** In a swelling sea of consumer choices, standing for something matters. Network news spent decades establishing its solid credentials. Now is no time for it to lose its nerve. If the people who run it want to ensure its future, they're going to have to change direction. To do it, they'll need to show some courage. Otherwise, oblivion may beckon after all. ■

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# The Road Traveled From Journalism to Jail

‘What is absent in journalism is not courage but consciousness and compassion.’

By David A. Sylvester

Six days after I took a buyout from my newspaper and left behind three decades in journalism, I did something I had never done before: I joined a protest against U.S.-sponsored torture and got myself arrested. I had covered demonstrations before but always as a reporter, playing the role of the detached observer. But this time I stepped out of my accustomed role and broke the journalist’s taboo, becoming one of 20,000 others who were protesting the policies and practices at the renamed School of the Americas that has trained the repressive Central and Latin American militaries for decades.

I’m now an inmate at a federal prison camp at Lompoc, California, serving a three-month sentence for trespassing onto a federal military installation with 36 other protesters as an act of civil disobedience. Between then and now I’ve had lots of time to reflect on what happened and why. Journalists reading my words may decide I’ve adopted “a point of view,” or become “political,” or lost my “objectivity,” or become “partial” to one side or the other. I don’t accept those labels, and I do wonder how those who would want to put them on me deal with the kind of shame I’ve felt for so many years after reading the impartial news accounts of assassinations, disappearances and torture.

Still, 25 years later, I feel ashamed of the tacit United States collusion with the killers of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador and ashamed of the El Mozote massacre, when 773 villagers in El Salvador were murdered by U.S.-trained soldiers. It’s humiliating to read the evasions and distortions of the Reagan administration officials who denied the massacre and then persecuted the reporters who broke the story. Now there is the torture of prisoners at Abu

Ghraib in Iraq. When these stories first came in, I was working as a copyeditor on the national desk at the San Jose Mercury News; in my job, I couldn’t skip the stories I didn’t like or ignore news irrelevant to my particular beat. I had to read every word of coverage and write some of the paper’s headlines and captions for those iconic photos. I had to digest the horror almost like it was my dinner and, even after work, on the way home, I still had the taste of it in my mouth.

Compared to the enormity of what had happened, the whole enterprise of journalism—from reporting to editing—seemed unbearably passive, like the people who discuss the progress of a fire as it burns through a neighbor’s house.

The problem with journalism isn’t a lack of courage. In spite of the pressures, there are still moments of great courage, even careers of courage. It takes courage to report outside the Green Zone in Iraq, and it took courage for The New York Times to break the story of the Bush administration’s warrantless wiretapping of U.S. citizens, and now to defend its right to do so against government pressures. But these moments stand out precisely because of their contrast with the main direction of journalism, which is rooted in the much-debated theology of “objectivity.”

Objectivity provokes lively debate, as journalism professors Geneva Overholser (my Nieman classmate from 1986) and Stephen Berry (a former investigative reporter) displayed in recent articles they wrote for Nieman Reports. To Overholser’s declaration that “‘Objectivity’ as a touchstone has grown worse than useless,” Berry responded with a defense: “Objectivity is a standard that requires journalists to try to put aside emotions and preju-

ices, including those implanted by the spinners and manipulators who meet them at every turn, as they gather and present the facts.” He describes the human being as being caught between “emotions and prejudices” and, citing Walter Lippmann, truth-seeking “scientific principles” that create “victories over superstitions of the mind.”

The flaw in Berry’s argument is that journalism, especially investigative journalism, has always been boldly and defiantly nonobjective. That has not made it subjective; it’s made it value-based. Journalism used to take as a core value the need to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable,” a quote attributed to Joseph Pulitzer but actually written by Chicago columnist Finley Peter Dunne. There’s no objective basis for saying that victims of oppression are important, in fact more important than, those who crush them for their advantage and then cloak their actions in platitudes and excuses. The truth takes sides; it sides with victims and challenges the oppressors. This is part of the structure of reality.

In my opinion, truth-seeking on behalf of those who are victimized is the courage that is missing in journalism. But today no one seems to care about the victims who populate so many of our news stories, especially when they live beyond our borders. Imagine how the Abu Ghraib scandal would have been reported had its victims been Americans treated in this way by Saddam Hussein’s secret police. To this day, most reporters covering Iraq seem entirely unaware of the toll that the U.S.-imposed sanctions had during the decade of the 1990’s, when an estimated 350,000 children under the age of five died from the lack of basic medicines and poor postwar conditions.

What is absent in journalism is not

courage but consciousness and compassion. An example from another era might show this more clearly than one taken from the heat of this moment.

On August 9, 1945, a New York Times reporter wrote the following lede: "We are on our way to bomb the mainland of Japan." In the next sentence, the reporter describes the "specially designed B-29 Superforts," one of which is carrying a bomb with "an explosive energy equivalent to 20,000 and under favorable conditions, 40,000 tons of TNT." The writer speculates on the target before describing how he watched the "small group of scientists and Army and Navy representatives privileged to be present at the ritual of this loading in the Superfort last night, against a background of threatening black skies torn open at intervals by great lightening flashes. It is a thing of beauty to behold, this 'gadget.'"

This "embedded" reporter was flying on the plane that dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki. At the distance of some 60 years, it seems remarkable that the reporter appears utterly unconscious of the 40,000 unsuspecting civilians who are about to be inciner-

ated. Actually he is perfectly aware of what's going to happen, but he doesn't care. Later in the story, he comments: "Does one feel any pity or compassion for the poor devils about to die? Not when one thinks of Pearl Harbor and of the Death March on Bataan."

This reporter did not lack courage in writing this article. Neither did he show cowardice. He was simply empty of any feeling for the victims. Despite military censorship, he might easily have written a more "balanced" and "objective" lede, perhaps using words such as these: "We're on our way to drop a bomb that might well end the war—at the cost of thousands of lives of unsuspecting civilian Japanese." But he didn't. He separated the world into what professor and author Noam Chomsky refers to accurately as the "worthy and the unworthy victims." Those who died at Pearl Harbor were worthy; those in Nagasaki unworthy.

The problem in journalism today is an epidemic of unconsciousness. Worthy victims seem only those within our borders, such as the victims of the attacks of September 11th, while those outside our borders, such as the Iraqi

civilians caught in the crossfire, are unworthy.

Yet when the press conferences and meetings are over, and the editors go home, and the lights go out and the presses are running, the villagers of El Mozote are still dead, and Iraqi parents are still grieving for their children who died during the 1990's sanctions, and relatives are still searching for answers about what happened at Abu Ghraib. This is the reality I contemplate as I lie on a prison bunk. For right now, prison feels like the right place to be. ■

*David A. Sylvester, a 1986 Nieman Fellow, was an assistant business editor and business reporter at the San Jose Mercury News. He is now a federal inmate and freelance writer. His essays and reflections on the actions that resulted in his prison sentence can be found at his Weblog, <http://bydavidsylvester.blogspot.com>*

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Until July 10:  
[lompocdavid@yahoo.com](mailto:lompocdavid@yahoo.com)

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## Two Sides of Courage

'Only after I left the foreign battlefields and returned to the United States did I discover the quiet part of courage in what it is I try to do.'

By Eli Reed

War zones test only a part of photojournalists' courage. It's the noisy part, filled with an odd mixture of bravado, determination and hope, layered onto an intense focus on the day-to-day job of bearing witness to brutality that is impossible to comprehend. Enduring such danger is one reliable way for photographers to build their reputations and get their pictures used. Only after I left the foreign battlefields and returned to the United States did I discover the quiet part of courage in what it is I

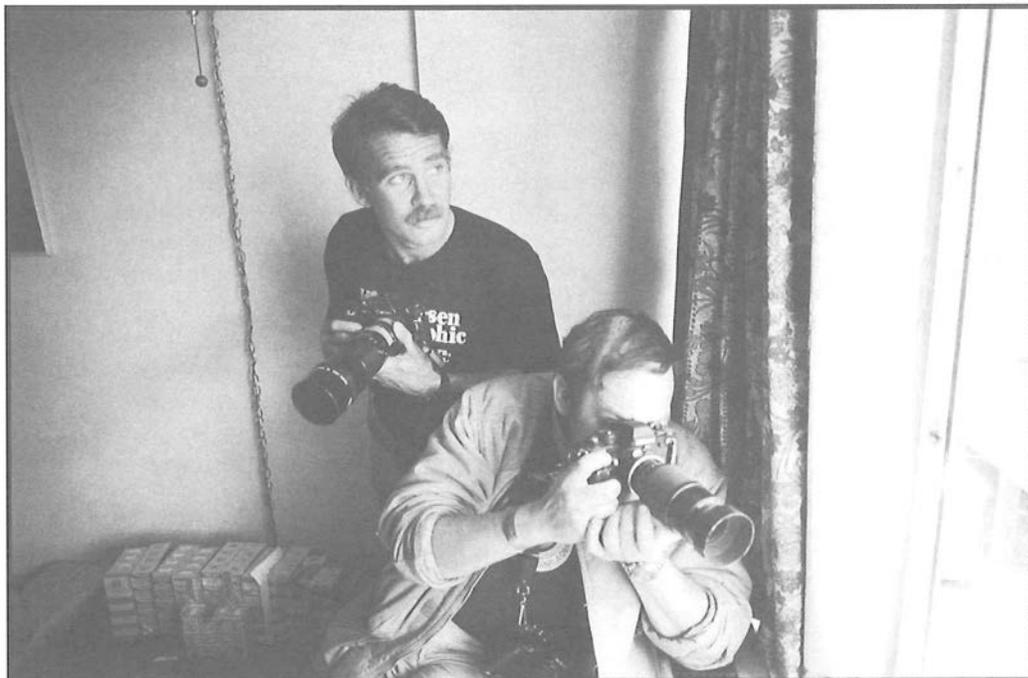
try to do.

As my early mentor, Donald Greenhaus, told me, for the photographer willing to chance rejection, and possibly ridicule, from those who hold the power to accept or reject his work, the opportunities are boundless. To bear witness to what isn't shown with the purpose of revealing an aspect of life no one expects to see is the challenge I took on. In an urban environment linked in people's minds to violence, there can be courage in a photographer's willingness to reject

those anticipated images in favor of showing some of the more affirming, unexpected moments of youngsters' daily life.

Easier to sell into a marketplace hungry for verification of what already is known about poverty and racism are the guns and blood, the street corner hangouts, and the swollen bellies of teenage girls. More enlightening, however, might be visual evocations of those quieter moments when what is revealed becomes worth knowing.

Beirut 1984: John Hoagland, Newsweek magazine staff photographer, Rick Tompkins, Associated Press stringer (with the camera to his eye), and I were taking photos of the Muslim revolt from a hotel window. This was my second tour covering the situation in Lebanon for Magnum Photos. We were shooting from the window because the fighting was too out of control and fierce on the street. Hoagland was sent to Beirut for a short break from El Salvador, where he had been covering the civil war. It was deemed unsafe for him to continue working there because death squads had threatened him. Beirut was relatively quiet and not seen as dangerous as El Salvador. After his work in Beirut, Hoagland returned to El Salvador where, on assignment, he was caught in crossfire and killed.



Northern Lebanon 1983: I remember another especially ugly day during internecine fighting in the Beddawi refugee camp. I was running for my life down a dusty road, moving with three other photojournalists away from our rocket-damaged car and the incoming shelling, which came down as if it were rain. I thought to myself, "I could be in San Francisco looking at the ocean and yet here I am preparing to die gracefully." Things started to unravel quickly, but I managed to take this photograph of my colleagues (the driver is to the left) after diving into a ditch as the shelling and the fighting raged around us.

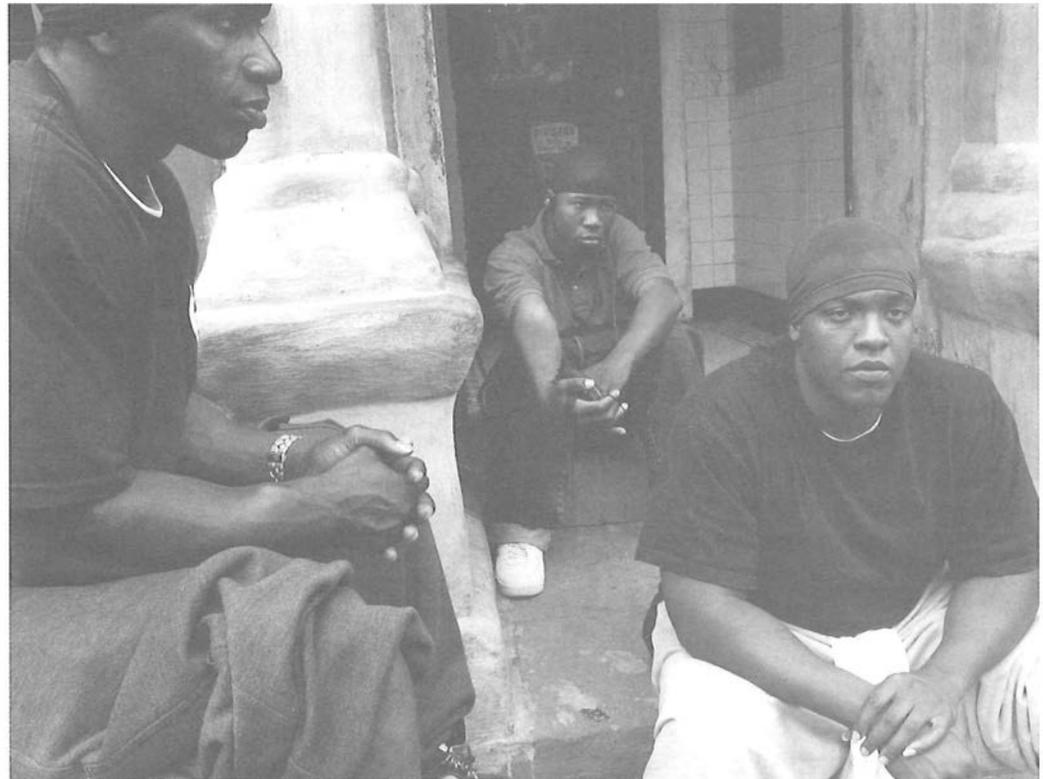


*Photos and captions by Eli Reed.*

Seattle, Washington, the 1990's: This photograph of a mother and her baby appeared in an issue of People magazine that was dedicated to an in-depth coverage of teenage pregnancy. Showing them together in this way illuminates the experience from a perspective that rarely is acknowledged in our national conversation about this emotional issue.



Harlem, New York, 2004: This photograph of young black men hanging out on a stoop was taken in late summer for a project I've been working on for a few years addressing what life looks like to those growing up in Harlem today. This kind of image isn't usually found in newspapers or magazines; predictable shots of action predominate, with the scent of trouble in the air.



*Photos and captions by Eli Reed.*

*Eli Reed, a 1983 Nieman Fellow, is a Magnum photojournalist and professor at the University of Texas at Austin. In his long career, he has covered civil wars and other events in El Salvador, Beirut, Haiti and Panama, as well as work documenting the black experience in America and Africa.*

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## Covering the Sago Mine Disaster

How a game of 'whisper down the coal mine' ricocheted around the world.

By Frank Langfitt

**W**hen most of the news media misreported that a dozen men had survived the coal mine disaster in Sago, West Virginia last January, critics reflexively pointed fingers at the usual suspects: the demands of the 24/7 news cycle, the erosion of attribution, and just plain sloppy reporting. For the audience, it probably seemed like just another screw up by an industry that is burning through its credibility.

But if you were working in the mud and misting rain in Sago early that morning, the truth was more complicated and the lessons deeper.

Communications technology was both a boon and a curse. Cell phones allowed us to report directly from a remote mountain hollow, but they also contributed to the confusion. Conversely, the same technology that allowed news organizations to beam the wrong information around the world in seconds also made it easier to correct later.

The limits of the oldest and most earth-bound medium, the print newspaper, were painfully clear. CNN could instantly change its story on air or on its Web site. But there was no refresh button to change the embarrassing headlines—"They're Alive" and "Miracles Happen"—on newspapers as they landed in driveways later that morning.

And when the story seemed to take a U-turn, we reporters should have been more skeptical. If more of us had stuck with the old adage—write what you know, not what you think you know—everyone would have been better off.

### The Beginning

How did this story get so messed up? It was a low-tech/hi-tech debacle, a game of "whisper down the coal mine" that ricocheted across the world. The story was transmitted through a breathtaking array of communication devices: hand-held radios, mobile phones, church bells, satellite trucks, and—finally—notes scribbled in the dark.

It begins a little before midnight, two days after New Year's. After more than 40 hours, rescuers find the men about two miles inside the mine. Eleven are dead, already cold to the touch, with rigor mortis setting in. One is barely alive.

But that's not the first message the rescuers send to the surface. They simply say they have found "12 individuals" and one is alive. They are using radios that can't transmit through the rock. So they send the message through five underground relay stations. Because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, some of the rescuers have to repeat the words through face masks.

By the time the message reaches the surface, it has morphed into, "Twelve Alive!"

In an earlier time, before mobile phones, the confusion might have remained there, at the mouth of the mine. But the mine company is broadcasting the radio traffic over speakers. Rescue workers nearby hear it and begin dialing their cell phones.

About 300 yards away—across a river, railroad tracks, and a police roadblock that keeps reporters at bay—a mine employee answers. He's at Sago Baptist Church, where hundreds of

friends and families of the trapped miners are waiting. Most have given up hope.

The news of survivors sweeps through the sweltering sanctuary. In celebration, someone begins ringing the bells in the steeple. Reporters are standing down the hill, corralled by police in a small, muddy area, warming themselves by open fires.

Agaggle rushes to the church. Family members say a mine foreman has told them that a dozen men have survived. West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin—apparently relying only on the families' account—gives a thumbs-up.

Anderson Cooper goes live on CNN.

### The Confusion Deepens

The coal company has no professional spokesperson and no one on-site to confirm or deny the story. Officials with the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration are also at Sago. But they give no briefings and are essentially invisible.

Newspaper reporters phone their desks. Editors change leads and headlines for the final edition. Some cover themselves by attributing the information to families. Others state it as fact.

I'm sitting in a hotel room 40 miles north, sending audio tape back to headquarters for National Public Radio's "Morning Edition." After I see CNN report the news, I call a colleague on the scene, Tom Vanden Brook of USA Today.

"Is this for real?" I say.

Only that afternoon, the coal com-

pany had tested air inside the mine and found fatal levels of carbon monoxide. I'd covered mine disasters before in Kentucky. They almost always end badly. I'm all but certain these men are dead.

"The families say they're alive," says Tom. "You should get down here."

I jump in the car and head south. News of survivors snowballs.

On the way back to the mine, I pass signs outside restaurants that hours earlier had read: "Pray for Our Miners." Now, they say: "Our Miracle Miners."

When I get to the mine road, state troopers have blocked it.

They are keeping it clear for the ambulances that will take the survivors to the hospital. I hike three miles back to the scene in the dark with a Fox News producer. He predicts the survivors will sell their rights to the story, and we'll be watching this as a movie of the week.

None of us are as keen as we might be. Most have been covering the story for two days straight with little or no sleep. Some people have been sleeping in their SUV's.

Back at the scene, I start working the story again, gathering tape from family members and waiting for confirmation from the coal company. I stay off the air, partly because I don't have a pressing deadline, partly because I feel I don't have the story.

Outside the mine, medical staff are preparing for survivors. Kevin Stingo works as a nurse at a nearby hospital. Later, he describes the scene to me when he arrived at the mine:

"One of the ER nurses was standing outside the tent on the cell phone, and she said, 'We've been told that all 12 are alive and that they're going to be bringing them out in stages.' So they were basically going to give us the worst of the patients. So we started getting ready, warmed up IV fluids,

priming IV lines, getting IV equipment, monitors out."

Later, a different woman wearing a nurse's uniform and an I.D. tag walks up to a CBS satellite truck, which is on the other side of the police line. She tells CBS correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi that she's been treating the men outside the mine. She gives their

cues—the ringing bells, the ambulances—reinforced the story.

But most of us suspended disbelief when we should have kept asking the nagging question: How did these guys survive? Maybe we got caught up in the emotions. Facing the tragedy of 12 dead men—fathers, brothers, sons—we were moved by a miracle, even if it defied logic. And perhaps we were

victims of our own humanity. It's a charge you don't hear leveled at reporters very often.

When the miners' bodies were brought to the surface, people found notes they had written while

they were dying. One was from Junior Hamner, a shuttle car operator with 26 years in the mines. He left the note in his lunch box for his wife and daughter. In a day filled with confusion and miscommunication, it was the clearest and most eloquent message.

"Hi, Deb and Sara. I'm still OK at 2:40 p.m. I don't know what is going on between here and outside. We don't hear any attempts at drilling or rescue. The section is full of smoke and fumes, so we can't escape. I just want you and Sara to know I love you both and always have. Be strong and I hope no one else has to show you this note. I'm in no pain, but don't know how long the air will last." ■

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**But most of us suspended disbelief when we should have kept asking the nagging question: How did these guys survive? Maybe we got caught up in the emotions. Facing the tragedy of 12 dead men—fathers, brothers, sons—we were moved by a miracle, even if it defied logic.**

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medical conditions in detail.

The "nurse," of course, is making the story up. Alfonsi, who is preparing for a morning report, never broadcasts the information.

Later, a Red Cross volunteer tells me that high profile disasters like Sago often attract mentally unstable people with rescue fantasies. But in a dark and muddy West Virginia hollow, how would you know?

Back at Sago Baptist, everyone is under the same impression as the phantom nurse. They are singing hymns and making room in the pews for a reunion with their loved ones. They expect the miners to walk through the front door any moment.

Instead they get Ben Hatfield, the mining company president, flanked by state troopers. Hatfield gives them the bad news. All but one are dead. He gets out as fast as he can.

People trickle out of the church, heads down, striding past reporters.

We learn the story that most of us have reported is completely wrong.

### Questions Remain

Why weren't we more skeptical? There were sources—family members, the governor, the phantom nurse—that seemed credible. All the physical

—1952—

**John O. Davies Jr.**, a former editor of the *Courier-Post*, died March 6th at his home in Ewing Township, New Jersey. He was 88 years old. Davies was the first journalist from that state to receive a Nieman Fellowship.

Davies worked for 25 years at the now-defunct Newark News, where he was political writer for more than a decade and covered both Republican and Democratic national conventions. During World War II, he served with the U.S. Marines as a sergeant and combat correspondent and was the only Marine to edit the *Army Stars and Stripes* in Shanghai, China. He later served as state house bureau chief and as a correspondent covering the Chinese civil war (1948-49) and the Korean War (1950). In 1962 he joined the Gannet Company and rose to become editor of the *Courier-Post*, where he stayed until retiring from journalism in 1975.

The author of two sports novels and a biography of the late Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague, "The Last of the Big City Bosses," Davies spent the first 13 years of his retirement as executive assistant to the New Jersey State Commission of Investigation. He also served as president of the New Jersey Legislative Correspondents Club as its

secretary-treasurer for 17 years.

Davies was a long-time member of the Yardley Country Club in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. According to his son, former-councilman John O. Davies III, even last summer he scored a respectable 91 on the golf course.

A memorial service for Davies was held April 10th in Pennington, New Jersey. He is survived by two sons, one brother, seven grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. His first wife, **Louise**, died in 1964. His second wife, **Ana**, died in 2000.

—1964—

**Robert (Bud) Korengold** was inducted April 24th into the "Hall of Achievement" of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. The honor is accorded annually to select graduates whose distinctive careers are considered to have contributed greatly to their fields. After graduating from Northwestern in 1951 and a Korean War stint in the U.S. Navy, Korengold was a UPI correspondent in Paris and a UPI bureau chief in Geneva and Moscow. After his Nieman year he returned to Moscow as *Newsweek's* bureau chief and went on to head the magazine's London bureau until late 1972. In 1973 he joined the former

U.S. Information Agency (USIA) first as a magazine editor and then as director of the agency's cultural, education and information programs at U.S. embassies in, successively, Brussels, Belgrade, London and Paris. For four years after his retirement from USIA in 1994 he also was the administrator of the Museum of American Art in Giverny, France. Korengold remains active journalistically covering France as senior correspondent for the American Web site [www.bonjourparis.com](http://www.bonjourparis.com)

**Dan Wakefield's** new book, "The Hijacking of Jesus: How the Religious Right Distorts Christianity and Promotes Prejudice and Hate," was published this spring by Nation Books. In the book, Wakefield questions why and how the Republican Party has been so successful in identifying themselves with the Christian faith, creating a situation where they are seen as the party of "moral values." Through an analysis of the religious right and interviews with religious leaders across the country, he explores how Christians can reclaim their faith.

—1966—

**Donald Jackson**, 70, died on February 23rd. **Wayne Woodlief**, a classmate,

## J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project 2006 Winners

Each year the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation honor three exceptional works of nonfiction that exemplify "literary grace, commitment to serious research, and social concern." This year Nate Blakeslee, Megan Marshall, and Laura Claridge received the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards at a ceremony held on May 9th at the Nieman Foundation. The recipients then participated in a panel entitled "Entering Another World: Journalism and Empathy," moderated by Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

- Nate Blakeslee received the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize (\$10,000) for his book "Tulia: Race, Cocaine, and Corruption in a Small Texas Town" (PublicAffairs).
- Megan Marshall won the Mark Lynton History Prize (\$10,000) for her book "The Peabody Sisters: Three Women who Ignited American Romanticism" (Houghton Mifflin).
- Laura Claridge received the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award (\$30,000) for "Emily Post and the Rise of Practical Feminism" (to be published by Random House). The Lukas Work-in-Progress Award is

given to aid the completion of a significant work of nonfiction on a topic of American political or social concern.

The J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards, established in 1998, honor and continue the work that distinguished the career of journalist and author **J. Anthony Lukas**, a 1969 Nieman Fellow. For more information on the awards, including 2006 finalists, juries and citations, see the awards page at [www.nieman.harvard.edu](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu) ■

## Nieman Fellows Win Pulitzers

**Stan Tiner's** (NF '86) paper, *The Sun Herald*, won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service "for its valorous and comprehensive coverage of Hurricane Katrina, providing a lifeline for devastated readers, in print and online, during their time of greatest need." This Pulitzer was also awarded to *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune*. Tiner is executive editor and vice president/news for the paper in Biloxi, Mississippi. **Bryan Monroe** (NF '03) was part of the Knight Ridder team and staff

of *The Sun Herald* that earned the Pulitzer. Monroe has been Knight Ridder's assistant vice president of news since 2002.

**Jerry Kammer** (NF '94) and his colleague Marcus Stern shared the 2006 National Reporting Pulitzer Prize for "their disclosure of bribetaking that sent former [California] Rep. Randy Cunningham to prison in disgrace." The Pulitzer, which was awarded to the staffs of *The San Diego Union-Tribune* and Copley News Service, singled out Kammer

and Stern for their "notable work" on the story, which spanned June through December of last year. Kammer covers U.S. and Mexico relations for Copley News Service. New York Times reporters James Risen and Eric Lichtblau also received the National Reporting Pulitzer for their December 2005 stories on secret domestic eavesdropping.

See [www.pulitzer.com](http://www.pulitzer.com) for more on this year's winners. ■

wrote the following tribute:

"Donald Dale Jackson, author of two well-read books on judges and the Gold Rush, died in his sleep, in his own bed, as he wanted, after coping with heart disease for several years.

"Jackson wrote *Life* magazine's cover story on Lee Harvey Oswald after President Kennedy's assassination, and he bailed out Nelson Rockefeller when that wealthy candidate, who seldom carried much cash, couldn't pay his bill at a coffee shop during the 1968 presidential campaign. Jackson earned awards for coverage of civil rights, the environment and prison reform, and after his Nieman year freelanced for *Readers Digest*, *Smithsonian* magazine, and *Sports Illustrated*. He explored jungles, traveled with medicine men, and once spent several nights alone in the desert to see what the experience was like.

"Husband of **Darlene Jackson** and father of two children, Dale Jackson and Amy Lynn Jackson Ayala, Jackson was a writer's writer. He filled his notebooks with how people looked, dressed, reacted to offense, and treated others. Reading his book "Gold Dust," you could smell the sawdust, taste the whiskey, hear the crack of a rifle, and see those miners toil.

"A quotation from an Indian prayer, circulated at the service for Jackson on February 27th in Newtown, Connecticut, included this closing line:

'Do not stand at my grave and cry. I am not there. I did not die.'"

—1977—

**Alfred Larkin, Jr.** was promoted to executive vice president of *The Boston Globe* in March. In his new position, Larkin is responsible for the *Globe's* corporate communications, organizational development, and community relations, including the *Globe* Foundation. He also is a senior adviser to Richard Gilman, the publisher of the *Globe*, and other members of the New England Media Group's senior management.

Larkin started as a reporter at the *Globe* in 1972 and has held a variety of management positions in the newsroom. In 1997 he moved to the business side of the newspaper as assistant to the publisher and most recently has been senior vice president for general administration and external affairs.

**MGG Pillai**, freelance journalist and political commentator, died on April 28th in Kuala Lumpur of heart complications. He was 66 years old. Pillai was the first from Malaysia to receive a Nieman Fellowship.

His son, Sreekant, recalls:

"MGG Pillai was born in Johor Bahru, Malaysia in 1939. He studied in English College (now known as Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar Johor Bahru), and Andrews

Singapore and studied law at the University of Singapore. While studying part-time in the early 1960's, he worked in Reuters Singapore as a journalist. As a Reuters correspondent in 1965, he covered the Vietnam War.

"In 1967, he joined Bernama for a short stint and then left and joined *Malay Mail* and covered the May 13th riots in 1969. When the *Singapore Herald* opened in 1970, he joined. He left when the Singapore government refused to renew his work permit.

"He started his freelance career writing for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER). He was already a stringer for the *Hindustan Times*. He wrote for FEER for three years until he started writing for *Asiaweek*, which he started with four others. While writing for *Asiaweek*, he was a stringer for *Newsweek*.

"After his Nieman year, he started contributing articles to a host of newspapers and broadcasting companies around the world. He was banned from Singapore in 1990 as a result of an article that he wrote criticizing the Singapore government.

"In 1995, he started the first Internet newsgroup called *Sang Kancil* where he posted commentaries and analysis of current issues. He later started his own Web site called [www.MGGPillai.com](http://www.MGGPillai.com), where readers were welcome to comment directly on his articles. He traveled widely to the United States,

Europe and Southeast Asia ...”

Pillai was known as a pioneer in Malaysia’s world of online journalism. The day following his death, *aliran.com*, the Web site of the Malaysian reform movement dedicated to justice and freedom, posted this tribute:

“Malaysian journalism has lost a legendary figure. We only hope that other journalists will be inspired by his courage and take up the baton he has handed over in the struggle for independent journalism in Malaysia.”

Pillai survived by his wife, **Jayasree** and his two sons.

**Bill Wheatley** received a 2006 First Amendment Service Award from the Radio-Television News Director’s Foundation at a banquet in Washington, D.C. in March. Wheatley, who had been executive vice president of NBC news before retiring nine months ago, was described by “Meet the Press” host Tim Russert “as the heart, soul and compass of NBC News.” The award honors three broadcast journalists for their work on behalf of press freedom. The other awards are The First Amendment Leadership Award, given to the Hurricane Katrina Station Groups, and the Leonard Zeidenberg First Amendment Award, given to Gwen Ifill. (See Wheatley’s article on page 98.)

—1978—

**Fred Barnes’s** book, “Rebel-in-Chief: Inside the Bold and Controversial Presidency of George W. Bush” was published by Crown Forum in January. In interviews with the President, vice president, secretary of state, and defense secretary, the book, according to Crown, provides access to an administration that is “shaking up Washington” and “reshaping the conservative movement.” Barnes is executive editor of *The Weekly Standard* and cohost of “The Beltway Boys” on the Fox News Channel.

—1983—

**Bill Marimow** was named vice president for news for National Public Radio (NPR) in March. He had been

managing editor since May 2004. In his new position, Marimow will oversee all of the news division, which includes approximately 350 employees and 36 bureaus around the nation and around the world. In making the announcement, Jay Kernis, senior vice president for programming, said, “Bill is a dedicated journalist who has already demonstrated ability to make a difference at NPR News, both in our newsgathering and in the ways we translate it to emerging platforms that are critical to the expansion of our public service.” Marimow bolstered beat coverage in areas including the media, technology, environment, police and prisons, and labor and the workplace. He also supervised many of NPR’s investigative pieces, which have received Robert F. Kennedy and Investigative Reporters and Editors Awards.

Before moving to NPR, Marimow was a reporter and editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, where he won two Pulitzer Prizes. Later, he was the managing editor and editor of *The (Baltimore) Sun*.

—1985—

**Ed Chen** has a new position. He writes: “I’ve left the *L.A. Times*, left *TribuneWorld*, left the newspaper business altogether, in fact. After 26 years at the *Times*, the last seven as its White House correspondent (and 36 in daily journalism), I have left for ‘greener’ pastures, going from an industry that kills trees to one that saves them. On March 20th, I became the first-ever director of federal communications for the NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council], the most respected and mainstream environmental advocacy group in the world. And I am thrilled to be doing the Lord’s work. Perhaps it’s a sign of the times—out of 12 (American) Niemanians in my class, eight are now out of daily journalism. What it says, I’m not sure.”

**Philip J. Hilts** writes: “I have just published my sixth book, one on global health that was linked to the six-part [WGBH] public television series. The book title is ‘Rx for Survival: Why We

Must Rise to the Global Health Challenge.’ I’m working on another book on global health issues and will be working in China, India and the Middle East over the next six months.”

Hilts has been a health and science reporter for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. His book “Protecting America’s Health: The FDA, Business, and One Hundred Years of Regulation” won the 2003 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Science and Technology.

—1990—

**Yossi Melman** writes, “After writing (and for a couple of years broadcasting) more than 4 million words (I did count them, using my paper’s library) in articles, features, commentary, news items, and investigative pieces over 32 years, and after publishing seven books in 11 languages in 35 countries, I wrote a play. It is called ‘The Good Son’ and is being staged in the Cameri, Tel Aviv, city theater.

“**Billie**, my wife, and I are working now to translate the play from Hebrew into English. If there are fellows who might be interested in reading the play and in helping me to find international stages and theaters, I would appreciate it very much and will send the translation once it is ready.

“The play is about treason and loyalty, love, patriotism, science and national security. It asks probing questions about loyalty and disloyalty and the shifting borderline between them. Why is modern society more tolerant of unfaithfulness to a wife or a husband, to children and family, than of disloyalty to country? The play seeks to grasp that porous divide, separating between the lawful and unlawful in a democracy, between right and wrong. Treason and loyalty appear to represent opposites. But when we touch the sets of notions behind both these opposites, we may expose moral dilemmas, which clash with laws and conventions. The traitor’s genetic code often contains the DNA of loyalty.

“The play also probes at the issue of science in the service of national security. Science is certainly not ‘pure.’ But

does it retain its autonomy? And how far can a democracy go in the name of its security? Can it 'expropriate' the scientist of his knowledge and divest him of his 'intellectual' property?"

—1993—

**Sandy Tolan** celebrated the release of his new book, "The Lemon Tree," at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.. He writes: "After three years of research, field work, and writing, I am delighted to announce the publication, on May 2nd, of 'The Lemon Tree: An Arab, A Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East,' from Bloomsbury. This true story goes to the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict through the experience of two families—one Arab, one Jewish—and their common history in the same stone home in al-Ramla, 30 miles west of Jerusalem. I tell this story not as an endless string of violence, but as a chronicle of two families with unending hopes, passions and attachment to the same place: in short, with everything at stake.

"... The book juxtaposes the history of the Khairis, a Palestinian family driven out of their home in al-Ramla during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, with that of the Eshkenazis, a Jewish family who escaped the Holocaust and who came to Israel, to al-Ramla, and to the same house, four months later, in November 1948.

"My wish is for 'The Lemon Tree' to serve as an opening for encounter between Arab and Jew and for deeper understanding—both for students of Middle Eastern history and for the general reader who has always wanted to understand the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict." To hear more about the book, go to Terry Gross's interview with Tolan on National Public Radio's (NPR) "Fresh Air," [www.npr.org/programs/fa](http://www.npr.org/programs/fa)

A project on global warming done by journalism students in Tolan's class can now be heard on "Living on Earth," NPR's weekly environmental news and information program. The latest installment of "Early Signs: Reports From a Warming Planet" documents Mount Kilimanjaro's melting icecaps, disappearing forests, and the effects

on the people living downstream. "Early Signs" is a joint production of the University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, where Tolan teaches, Salon.com, and "Living On Earth." Transcripts, audio clips, and more information on the project can be found at [www.loe.org](http://www.loe.org)

—1994—

**Gregory E. Brock** has been promoted to senior editor of The New York Times. In that role, he works on the frontlines of the newsroom's dealings with the public, taking incoming compliments and complaints, coordinating corrections and editors' notes with all departments, and working closely with the standards editor and the public editor.

Brock joined the Times in 1995 after nine years with The Washington Post. He was selected for the Nieman program in 1994 while a news editor at the Post. During a two-year break from the Post, Brock was assistant managing editor/news for The San Francisco Examiner from 1987-89. Earlier in his career, he was news editor for The Charlotte Observer, where he worked from 1977-1983.

**Katie King** joined the Center for Public Integrity last fall as director of communications and digital publishing. King is involved with a team that is creating a digital and online strategy to extend the reach of the center's award-winning investigative reports. The center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to producing original, responsible investigative journalism on issues of public concern.

Since 1989, the center has released more than 275 investigative reports and 14 books. In the past eight years it has been honored more than 31 times by, among others, PEN USA, Investigative Reporters and Editor, the Society of Professional Journalists, and the George Polk award (online category).

—1995—

**Michael Riley's** newspaper, The Roanoke Times, has won a number

of awards this year. Riley, the paper's editor, writes:

"It has been a good year for The Roanoke Times. For the second time in four years, we've been ranked number one in daily newspaper readership by Scarborough Research, which tracks the percentage of adult readers in the top U.S. markets who read their local newspaper.

"We've also been pushing the envelope in online multimedia for several years, and this past year we've been fortunate enough to garner some national recognition for our integrated print and online efforts.

"Among our recent awards: the Scripps Howard Foundation's National Journalism Award in Web Reporting for a multimedia package on old-time mountain music; the Associated Press Managing Editors Online Convergence Award for a project on Somali Bantu immigrants; a Newspaper Association of America Digital Edge Award for Most Innovative Multimedia Storytelling for a trio of packages, including one on tornado chasing; a National Headliner Award, and a 2006 EPpy award for best overall newspaper-affiliated Web service under one million unique monthly visitors. We've also been recognized as a Top 10 sports section by the Associated Press Sports Editors.

"The best thing about these awards is that they stand as tangible recognition of our fine staffers who pursue journalistic excellence every day."

**Lou Ureneck** is acting chairman of Boston University's Department of Journalism. He writes: "I was elected chairman ad interim of the Department of Journalism by the journalism faculty last week. I'm looking forward to leading the department through a turbulent period of change in the field. Just as newspapers must adapt to a new world and find ways to encourage and support journalism worthy of the First Amendment, so must journalism education. My two principal goals are to integrate the concept of convergence in all its complexity into the curriculum and help the faculty find ways to engage in the national conversation over the future of journalism."

## The Sacramento Bee Wins Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers

The Sacramento Bee received the 2006 Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers for “The Pineros: Men of the Pines,” a series by Tom Knudson and Hector Amezcua that documents the misuse and abuse of Latino immigrants in America’s forest industry.

In nine months of work on “The Pineros: Men of the Pines,” Knudson and Amezcua discovered that some of the contractors who employ these workers have been cited for violating federal labor laws, yet the contractors are paid with federal funds. “Much of the mistreatment is unfolding inside a government program that invites foreign workers to the United States to fill labor shortages,” they reported in the first story of the series.

The judges praised the Bee’s series for including all the groups affected by this timely issue and for “the way the pictures and stories gave a voice to people who are rarely heard.”

The judges also recognized two finalists:

**The Blade (Toledo, Ohio) for the series “State of Turmoil,”** which explained

how a \$50 million investment in a rare-coin fund controlled by one of President Bush’s biggest Ohio fundraisers became a major political scandal. Columbus Bureau Chief James Drew and staff writers Mike Wilkinson, Steve Eder, Christopher D. Kirkpatrick, Joshua Boak, and Jim Tankersley reported the story. Special Assignments Editor Dave Murray managed the Blade’s investigation.

**East Valley Tribune (Mesa, Arizona) for “Mesa en Transición,”** a series that examines the fundamental demographic and cultural shift that is changing Mesa into a primarily Hispanic city from one that’s been heavily identified with white Mormons since it was founded almost 130 years ago. Mary K. Reinhart, Kristina Davis, Blake Herzog, John Yantis, Brian Powell, CeCe Todd, Jennifer Pinner, Slim Smith, Leigh Shelle Hunt, and Julio Jimenez contributed to the series. Patti Epler was the project editor.

The winner and finalists were honored at a dinner and discus-

sion held May 11th at the Nieman Foundation.

The judges for the 2006 award were Robin Gaby Fisher, a 2005 Taylor Award winner from The Star-Ledger (Newark, N.J.); William B. Ketter, editor in chief and vice president of news at The Eagle-Tribune (Lawrence, Mass.); **Terry Tang** (NF ’93), metro beats editor at The New York Times, and Melinda Patterson Grenier, Nieman Foundation director of communications. Nieman Curator **Bob Giles** (NF ’66) was the chair of the jury.

The Taylor Award, which carries a \$10,000 prize, was established through gifts for an endowment by Chairman Emeritus of The Boston Globe, William O. Taylor, along with members of his family. The purpose of the award is to encourage fairness in news coverage by daily newspapers in the United States.

To read “The Pineros: Men of the Pines,” go to [www.sacbee.com/content/news/projects/pineros](http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/projects/pineros) ■

Ureneck is a former vice president of the Portland Press Herald and served as assistant to the editor and deputy managing editor for The Philadelphia Inquirer. He joined the faculty of Boston University in 2003.

—1998—

**Philip Cunningham** is now teaching journalism and media full time at Doshisha University in Kyoto, “a fine university historically linked to Amherst College, with a touch of New England brick and green lawns in the otherwise cramped but delightful ancient capital of Kyoto,” he writes. “I’ve been thinking of my Nieman year, not least because I am using Bill Kovach’s text in a journalism course on the history of journalism. I use the Thucydides

quote about the art of being a good observer, so true, and especially effective when lecturing in a city that for a thousand years was a national capital. I put the quote on the board and had the class try to guess who said it when (the best guess was off by 2500 years or so—Ed Murrow!)

“I’m sure Bill will not be entirely amused to know I first came across ‘Elements of Journalism’ unawares in an English language text purchased in China. A full seven unattributed chapters of the book made it into the Chinese textbook. What sparked my curiosity after a good read (no doubt subliminally familiar from Nieman lectures) is that it ended abruptly just when it got to the watchdog role of the press. Coincidence?

“[My family and I] arrived in Kyoto

from Beijing, where we were put up in a 700-year-old tea house (which probably aged another century or so due to the happy frolicking of my kids) while looking for lodging. So far it reminds me of my Nieman year, back on campus with a modicum of security after a long stretch of freelance journalism and commentary writing. For those passing through Japan, feel free to visit. My e-mail is [jinpeili@gmail.com](mailto:jinpeili@gmail.com). [See Cunningham’s article on page 25.]

—1999—

**Suzanne Sataline** is now The Wall Street Journal’s religion reporter, based in Boston, Massachusetts. Before writing about Catholic assets fights and denomination squabbles, she was a staff writer at The Philadelphia Inquirer.

## —2000—

**Kwang-chool Lee** has left his position as bureau chief of the Korean Broadcasting System's (KBS) Washington, D.C. office and returned to Seoul, Korea as director of their KBS news center. Lee is a former deputy editor and anchorman of KBS Evening News.

**Mary Kay Magistad** shared a 2006 Scripps-Howard National Journalism Award with two fellow correspondents and an editor at the Public Radio International/BBC program "The World" for their series on stem cell research in China (Mary Kay's contribution), Israel, Britain and the United States. The series, which also won a 2006 duPont-Columbia silver baton, offered a primer on stem cell research, as the interests of science, medicine, politics and religion converge and conflict in the ethical debate over their use. Mary Kay is "The World's" Beijing-based Northeast Asia correspondent.

## —2001—

**Don Aucoin** was named a finalist for the Freedom Forum/ASNE Award for Outstanding Writing on Diversity for his contributions to The Boston Globe's "How We Live Here" series on race relations. Aucoin's work will appear in "Best Newspaper Writing 2006," to be published this fall by the Poynter Institute.

## —2002—

**Roberta Baskin** resigned as executive director of The Center for Public Integrity as of June 15th and was succeeded by Managing Director Wendell Rawls, Jr.. In an announcement made by the center, Baskin said she plans to focus on investigative and documentary television projects. While under Baskin's leadership, the center won the Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Awards for online investigative and public service reports and received first place honor for in-depth reporting by an online publication from the Association of

Capitol Reporters and Editors. She also oversaw the development and launch of the center's database project, Lobby-Watch, which is a resource of lobbying information for news organizations.

## —2003—

**Raviv Drucker** and Ofer Shelah have coauthored a book in Hebrew. "Boomerang: The Failure of Leadership in the Second Intifada" was published in Jerusalem by Keter Books in 2005, the month before Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's planned disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. According to Jerusalem-based freelance writer David Dabscheck in his review of the book in Foreign Policy, "Boomerang" "contain[s] the explosive charge that the pullout was concocted more to protect Sharon from a looming corruption indictment than to protect Israel's national security." Packed with interviews, examinations of classified documents, and accounts from top-level officials, "Boomerang" has become a favorite of those opposed to disengagement. Sharon's critics called for an investigation based on the authors' allegations, but the newly installed attorney general exonerated Sharon on the corruption charge before the book's release citing its reliance on unnamed sources, writes Dabscheck. Drucker is a political commentator on Israel's Channel 10 News.

## —2004—

**Pekka Mykkanen** will become Washington, D.C. correspondent for his newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat. He and his wife, **Yin Zi**, and son, Miro, will be moving to the United States in August. He writes, "This will be a very important period in our lives and Miro's life especially, which makes us even more enthusiastic. Yin Zi is also excited about her work. She was recently asked to write columns/articles for the Chinese-language Web version of the Financial Times. She also contributes to one economic daily and one art magazine, so she can be writing as much as she wants." They expect to be in Washington for 4-5 years.

## —2005—

**Richard Chacón** has left The Boston Globe to become director of communications for Deval L. Patrick, a Democrat running for governor of Massachusetts. Chacón, who had been at the Globe for about 12 years, spent the past year as ombudsman. In the paper's announcement, Chacón said he wanted to work with Patrick because of "the message that he's trying to get out to the people. I'm truly excited about this, and I just think that this is kind of a new and different kind of public service from what I was doing before as a journalist." In his career at the Globe, Chacón has been deputy foreign editor, Latin America correspondent, and city hall reporter.

**Henry Jeffreys** was appointed editor in chief of the Cape Town daily Die Burger, effective June 1, 2006. Die Burger is the flagship daily of the Naspers Group, South Africa's largest media company. Jeffreys and his family are relocating to Cape Town from Johannesburg. At the time of his Nieman year, Jeffreys was deputy editor of Beeld in South Africa.

**Maggie Mulvihill** began a new job in April as the investigative producer for CBS 4 in Boston.

**Ceri Thomas** is now editor of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Radio 4's "Today," a flagship news and current affairs program.

"For my money, this is the best job in BBC daily journalism," said Thomas in a news release. "It's fascinating and full of challenges, and I'm very fortunate to be taking it on at a time when the program's in such good shape. ... I'm tremendously excited to be given the chance to build on it."

Helen Boaden, BBC director of news, said: "Ceri Thomas is an excellent and experienced journalist with a great instinct for connecting with audiences. His flair and passion for radio make him the ideal editor for "Today.""

Thomas previously worked for "Today" as a junior producer in 1991, progressing to assistant editor (1995).

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

In his essay (NR Spring 2006) on the coverage of Andrei Sakharov by Western correspondents in Moscow, Murray Seeger attacks—not for the first time—the integrity and journalistic honesty of Henry Shapiro (NF '55), the longtime UPI bureau chief there. Murray writes that “Henry Shapiro, near retirement after 40 years in Moscow, refused to allow his UPI correspondents to compete with reporters from the AP and Reuters in covering the dissidents. Stories on this topic were filed only on orders from UPI’s New York office until Shapiro retired in 1973.”

This is false. I know because, unlike Murray, I was one of Henry’s correspondents in the Moscow bureau from 1965-68, before my own Nieman. Henry, who had lived through the worst of the Stalin years, never really understood what Sakharov and the other dissidents against the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime were all about. But he certainly never tried to stop us younger UPI correspondents, who thought it was a terrific story. I broke the Sinyavsky-Daniel arrests, interviewed Pavel Litvinov and Larisa Daniel, covered the Ginzburg trial and other trials and demonstrations. My UPI colleagues and I kept up a steady run of good dissident stories, and Henry gave us our head. He never “refused to allow” us to cover those stories, nor was there any order from New York. UPI’s editors recognized Henry for what he was, the most distinguished Moscow correspondent of his day, and wouldn’t have dreamed of telling him how to run his bureau.

While Henry’s integrity is unsailable, he could be a difficult character, reveled in feuds, and suffered no fools. Perhaps Murray is settling

some old scores here. He certainly knows better. In NR several years ago, he attacked Henry’s journalistic ethics, accusing him of cutting corners to stay in good with the Kremlin. I responded then with a letter similar to this one, which NR printed, setting the record straight. To pursue this vendetta now shows bad faith, to say the least. Henry is long dead and unable to defend himself, but I am honored to do so.

**Richard C. Longworth, NF '69**

✉ [rlongworth@ccfr.org](mailto:rlongworth@ccfr.org)

To the Editor:

I am glad to see Dick Longworth is still defending the honor of Henry Shapiro. It is hard to find anyone else who knew Henry in Moscow who will challenge the evidence most of us have of Henry’s life of compromises with the rulers of the Soviet Union. Shapiro learned journalism as a stringer for foreign news agencies in Moscow before he took over the UP and later UPI job. He never worked any place else; for him Moscow was the real world. No wonder, as Longworth admits, Shapiro never understood what the dissidents were complaining about.

I met Shapiro in Cambridge in 1961 when he visited Harvard during a home leave. Although the Nieman Foundation had sheltered him when he was forced to leave Moscow during a Stalinist anti-Jewish campaign (leaving his Russian wife behind), Shapiro refused to meet with our class after he met with Harvard faculty.

Within my first two weeks in Moscow in 1972, I visited Shapiro. He invited me—as he did every

new correspondent—to work with him and Agence France Presse in league against The Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. In return for any stories I gave him, he would give me stories. Since AP and Reuters were vigorous in covering dissidents, this arrangement left UPI out of touch. Bill Long and Ray Moseley, who succeeded Shapiro, got the UPI back on the story.

My anecdotes and conclusions about Shapiro derive from former UPI staff members, most of whom revere him, other correspondents, and from my own observations. I note that Dick Longworth left Moscow in 1968, before the Jewish emigration and Sakharov stories became so important. Arrests and trials are specific events; no agency could afford to not report them.

I have no “feud” with Shapiro. Like most Moscow correspondents, I was hoping he would write a memoir after he retired and went to University of Wisconsin-Madison as journalist in residence. But he never wrote a memoir and few articles except to criticize other correspondents for their lack of understanding about the USSR. In research for my book, “Discovering Russia: 200 Years of American Journalism,” I found a telling comment made by Aline Mosby, a former UPI Moscow correspondent, after Shapiro died in 1991: “I think he always hoped that the Soviet system, the socialist system, would work, and that they would get out of their problems.”

**Murray Seeger, NF '62**

✉ [MURSEEG@aol.com](mailto:MURSEEG@aol.com)

He then worked as an editor at “Radio Five Live” and over time became head of news. After his Nieman year, he was radio newsgathering editor, with a focus on strengthening the relationship between radio news and BBC newsgathering.

—2006—

**David Heath**, along with fellow reporter Luke Timmerman, wrote the story that won two awards for The Seattle Times. “Drug researchers leak

secrets to Wall St.,” published last August, exposed a Wall Street practice of paying medical researchers for details on potential drugs to get an investment edge. The article received the Scripps Howard Foundation’s 2005 National Journalism Award for Business/Economics Reporting, which included the William Brewster Styles award and a cash prize of \$10,000. The award was presented April 21st at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C..

The Society of American Business Writers and Editors also gave The Se-

attle Times its Best in Business projects award in the large newspaper category for the story. Winners were honored in a ceremony held April 30th in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Heath and Timmerman’s story, which exposed 26 cases of doctors breaking confidentiality agreements, has led to Securities and Exchange Commission investigations and a crack-down by the Association of American Medical Colleges to “scrupulously honor” confidentiality. ■

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## John Kenneth Galbraith, Nieman Friend, Dies

*John Kenneth Galbraith died on April 29th in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was 97. Here are some excerpts from two remembrances on the Nieman Web site, [www.nieman.harvard.edu/galbraith/pageone/](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/galbraith/pageone/)*

In the early years of the program, Harvard professors resisted the idea of welcoming journalists into their classrooms. Ken, then a young instructor in economics persuaded them by observing that they and their students would learn from the perspectives that journalists could contribute to class discussions.

When the Nieman Foundation moved to Walter Lippmann House in 1978, the fellows and staff found in Ken and Kitty Galbraith warm and welcoming neighbors.

In recent years, even as his health was failing, Ken was determined to continue his annual conversation with the fellows. Often these occasions began with the sight of Kitty pushing Ken in his wheelchair up the circular brick walk to Lippmann House. One year, when Ken was bedfast, he invited the fellows to come by in groups of three or four to sit by his bed while he held forth on the issues of the day.

The next year, his first pilgrimage outside was to Lippmann House. “I must tell you this is a very great and welcome day for me,” he said on that

occasion. “It’s the farthest I’ve been away from home in nearly a year... It’s entirely appropriate, though that it is to the Nieman center, one of the oldest associations I have with Harvard.”

The last time we saw Ken was during the annual Francis Avenue block party in September 2005. He sat in his wheelchair to greet all who would approach. Several fellows sat with him. He drew them in close with his large left hand as he inquired about their newspapers or their countries and their purpose at Harvard.

On the day we learned that Ken had died, we felt a great sense of loss. But we cherish the support he gave the Nieman Foundation in the beginning and the knowledge and enthusiasm he shared with the fellows over the next 67 years. ■ —**Bob Giles**, NF ’66

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In 1991, I arrived at Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow. Across the road, we were told, lived Professor Galbraith. And better still, he was a “Nieman friend,” and had been invited to speak to the fellows early in 1992.

The day arrived. Galbraith spoke about his pet theme—that America put its world leadership at risk by leaving so many of its citizens poor and by its failure to invest enough in public services.

Given his age, you might have expected his focus would lapse or trend of thought would be occasionally interrupted. But no, he was remarkably articulate. But more striking for a man of his fame, he didn’t take himself too seriously.

I saw him often, taking walks along the street. At Lippmann House, though, we felt his presence more regularly. It seems every important publisher and author of books on international affairs in the world sent Galbraith advance copies for review. Even if he did nothing else, there was no way he could read more than a handful. They were so many, if he didn’t remove them from the house, they would soon have been stacked to the roof.

To avoid that catastrophe, nearly every week a box full of the books and journals arrived at Lippmann House. The foundation kept a few, and the fellows were at liberty to take their pick. And in that way we read some of the most important books that were to be published in the United States in the early 1990’s months before they hit the shelves of the bookshops.

Galbraith taught us that a man’s, or indeed woman’s, best gift is the brain—not the body. ■ —**Charles Onyango-Obbo**, NF ’92, from an article he wrote for The East African

# A Nieman Classmate Remembers William F. Woo

By Philip Meyer

The Nieman class of 1967 graduated in interesting times, and William F. Woo enjoyed them as much or more than any of us. It was the decade when the newspaper industry first began to track readership numbers, and soon they would start to fall. Fear of the future motivated publishers to increase their support for quality journalism. A golden age began.

For Bill Woo, that brought exciting work after Harvard. He had been a feature writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and he returned to the paper with freedom to travel and dream up his own assignments on social and cultural trends. He saw these projects “essentially as Harvard term papers turned into journalism: unemployment in the black community, America’s housing problems, explicit sex in the cinema . . . , and campus rebellion,” he told Joseph Pulitzer, Jr.’s biographer, Daniel W. Pfaff. That work led to other job offers. To keep him, the Post-Dispatch made him assistant editor of the editorial page, putting him on a track to become editor of the page in 1973.

A close relationship with Pulitzer—like father and son, members of both families recall—gave him the freedom to grow in that job. His personal history provided empathy and the ability to reach across cultures. His parents had met at the University of Missouri, and Bill was born in Shanghai where he spent the years of World War II. Once he recalled watching “from the upstairs porch of our home on Avenue Haig as wave after silver wave of American planes filled the sky with red and yellow parachutes” dropping supplies to Westerners in Shanghai.

His parents divorced after the war, and Bill was raised from the age of 10 in Kansas City by his mother. He majored in English literature at the University of Kansas, then reported

for the Kansas City Times, which was the morning edition of the Kansas City Star. The Post-Dispatch hired him away five years later.

When he became editor of the paper in 1986—he was “the first editor not named Joseph Pulitzer”—Bill continued writing opinion. “He wrote a beautiful conversational column every Sunday,” recalls William Freivogel, former deputy editor of the editorial page. “He was able to talk about issues that faced the world, the nation, and the community, and he could relate these issues to his family, wife and three boys.”

By the 1990’s, the good times had waned. Newspapers continued to lose readers to more specialized forms of media. Joseph Pulitzer died in 1993, and his successor, Michael Pulitzer, wanted to experiment with new forms. Bill clung to the old values, a dedicated hard-news man. The conflict led to his move to Stanford University in 1996, where he continued to write columns in the form of letters to his students, each making a philosophical point about journalism and society.

In a 2005 Thanksgiving piece, he mentioned the problem of finding appropriate words of thanks at the dinner table without sounding too personal or trite. He brought up the case of Amnat Khunyosying, the Thailand editor who was shot for criticizing public officials. “I was truly thankful for him and for the brave men and women around the world whose daily struggles are a testament to the power of an idea, namely that the freedom to think and to write and to speak is the dividing line between liberty and slavery,” he wrote.

Bill departed gently from St. Louis, writing his last newspaper column in a cabin above the Meramec River at the edge of the Ozarks. Below him, he said, the river flowed “old and slow and

green, coming from somewhere else, now approaching a bend under high limestone and then going on its way, toward another place that cannot be seen from here.

“It is a still, peaceful morning, and this is the time.”

His academic career was ended by cancer 10 years later in Palo Alto on April 12th. His last e-mail, composed the day before, urged his Stanford colleagues to increase the financial aid offer to a prospective student. When he died, his computer was still on. ■

*Philip Meyer, a 1967 Nieman Fellow, is the Knight Chair in Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He can be reached at pmeyer@email.unc.edu.*

NOTE: The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the William F. Woo Memorial Journalism Education Fund at The University of Hong Kong in Hong Kong, China. The fund will be used to bring Chinese journalists to Hong Kong and the United States to study journalism. Checks should be made payable to Friends of the University of Hong Kong, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) organization, in care of Monica Yeung, executive director, 1321 Sydney Drive, Sunnyvale, California 94087. E-mail: usfriend@hku.hk

Please designate the William F. Woo Memorial Journalism Education Fund in the memo field. Any donation to this fund should be eligible for employer’s matching funds, where available. ■

## Nieman Foundation Announces Fellows for 2006-07

*The 2007 class of Nieman Fellows has been selected. The names and affiliations of the U.S. and international fellows are:*

### U.S. Fellows

**Gina Acosta**, editorial page copyeditor, The Washington Post.

**Christopher Cousins**, reporter, The Times Record/Brunswick (Maine) Publishing Company. Cousins is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Community Journalism, with funding provided by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

**Renee Ferguson**, investigative reporter, WMAQ TV NBC-5 Chicago.

**Dexter Filkins**, Baghdad correspondent, The New York Times.

**Eliza Griswold**, freelance journalist, New York, New York.

**Evelyn Hernández**, opinion page editor, El Diario/La Prensa.

**Ian Johnson**, Berlin reporter/editor, The Wall Street Journal.

**David Kohn**, medical and science reporter, The Sun, Baltimore, Maryland. Kohn is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Andrea McCarren**, investigative reporter, WJLA-TV, Washington, D.C.

**Cameron McWhirter**, staff writer/metro, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

**Claudio Sanchez**, national education correspondent, National Public Radio.

**James Scott**, general assignment reporter, The Post and Courier, Charleston, South Carolina.

**Tini Tran**, Vietnam bureau chief, The Associated Press.

**Craig Welch**, environment reporter, The Seattle Times.

### International Fellows

**Harro Albrecht** (Germany), medical writer/editor, Die Zeit. Albrecht

is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Tangeni Amupadhi** (Namibia), editor, Insight Namibia magazine. Amupadhi is the Montalbano Fellow, with funding provided by the **William Montalbano** [NF '70] Memorial Fund.

**Yuyu Dong** (China), opinion page editor in chief, Guangming Daily. Dong is the Carroll Binder Fellow, with funding provided by the Carroll Binder Fund.

**Alagi Yorro Jallow** (Gambia), managing editor, The Independent newspaper. Jallow is the Bingham Fellow, with funding provided by the Barry Bingham, Jr. Fund.

**Damakant Jayshi** (Nepal), deputy news editor, The Kathmandu Post. Jayshi is the Chiba Nieman Fellow, with funding provided by the **Atsuko Chiba** [NF '68] Nieman Fellowship Fund.

**Juanita Leon** (Colombia), Semana online editor, Publicaciones Semana. Leon is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow, with funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

**Rose Luwei Luqiu** (China), assignment editor, Phoenix Satellite Television. Luqiu is the Ruth Cowan Nash Fellow, with funding provided by the Nash Fund.

**Kondwani Munthali** (Malawi), broadcast journalist, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. He is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Patsy Nakell** (Finland), editor in chief, NyTid. She is the Robert Waldo Ruhl Fellow, with funding provided by the Robert Waldo Ruhl Fellowship Fund. Her fellowship is also supported by Svenska Kulturfonden.

**Anja Niedringhaus** (Germany), photographer, The Associated Press.

Her fellowship is supported by the Buffett Foundation.

**Kate Peters** (United Kingdom), world news producer, British Broadcasting Corporation.

**Gail Smith** (South Africa), editor, Pulse Magazine (City Press). Her fellowship is supported by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.

**Mauricio Herrera Ulloa** (Costa Rica), investigative journalist, La Nación. He is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow, with funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

**Jungho Yoon** (South Korea), staff writer, The Chosun Ilbo. Yoon's fellowship is funded by The Asia Foundation and the Sungkok Journalism Foundation.

The U.S. fellows were selected by: **Cecilia Alvear** (NF '89), an NBC producer in Los Angeles; **Hodding Carter III** (NF '66), University Professor of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Kathleen Molony, director of the Weatherhead Fellows Program in International Studies at Harvard University; Ken Winston, a lecturer in political and professional ethics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and **Bob Giles** (NF '66), committee chairman and Nieman Foundation Curator.

Two other people worked with Giles to select the Nieman Global Health Fellows. They are **Stefanie Friedhoff** (NF '01), freelance correspondent and science writer, and Jay Winsten, an associate dean and the Frank Stanton Director of the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health. ■

## Conscience and Integrity in Journalism

The Louis M. Lyons Award, given by Nieman classes, recognizes journalists who display these elements of moral courage.

By Jim Doyle

When the Nieman class arrived in the fall of 1964, the Louis M. Lyons Award was just a plaque that was hung in the Nieman office, unassuming in appearance. Soon the idea of the Lyons award became close to our hearts. We were the last class chosen under Lyons' curatorship, and we came to respect him and his wife, Totty, during visits we had with them during our Nieman year. A few months earlier the class that preceded ours had awarded it for the first time in honor of their retiring curator. The journalists they'd selected to receive the award, which had been created to recognize conscience and integrity in journalism, were American correspondents in Vietnam cited for reporting "the truth as they saw it ... without yielding to unrelenting pressures ... from numerous sources including the United States government."

As a Boston Globe reporter, I already knew Lyons because I'd reported on some of his speeches, lectures and appearances at forums on public affairs. In the Globe's city room I'd heard the stories of his scoops, the most famous being his interview with Joseph P. Kennedy, then U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James's (Great Britain), in which his defeatist views toward the coming war were exposed.

The story led the Sunday paper on November 10, 1940, at a time when Nazi troops occupied Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France, and German bombs were falling on London and other British cities. The

headline read: "Kennedy Says Democracy All Done," and the story began with these words: "Joseph P. Kennedy was sitting in his shirtsleeves eating apple pie and American cheese in his room at the Ritz-Carlton. His suspenders hung around his hips."

In the interview, Kennedy was reactionary toward Europe and isolationist and defeatist about the war with Germany. One explosive quote in a long and garrulous performance ended Kennedy's hope for a political career: "Democracy is finished in England. It may be here."

After the story was published, Kennedy tried to deny the quote, but Lyons had a witness, Ralph Coglan, editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Kennedy claimed the interview was off-the-record, but Lyons covered that in his original story as well:

"Coglan and I rushed for a cab to get to an office where we could compare notes and save every crumb we could of Kennedy's talk. Coglan, an editorial writer, wanted it only for background. He didn't have a story to write.

"I wouldn't be in your shoes," said Coglan. 'How do you know what you can write? He just puts it up to you to follow your own conscience and judgment and protect him in his diplomatic capacity.'

"Well, last time I interviewed him in 1936 he poured himself out just like this, without laying any restriction on me, and I wrote every bit of it, and it went all over the country—the inter-

view in which he said why he was for Roosevelt. And he said it was the best interview he'd ever had. But he wasn't an ambassador then."

It was a great story, accurately reflecting Kennedy's negative views toward the allied powers and a certain inevitability for Adolf Hitler in an interview that had rambled on for 90 minutes. The impact was immediate. Kennedy was finished not only as ambassador to the Court of St. James's, but also as a power in the Roosevelt administration. The interview created a less welcome legacy for The Boston Globe, earning that paper the undying enmity of one of Boston's most powerful families. Kennedy controlled much of the liquor commerce along the East Coast, and for 20 years or more he saw to it that few if any brands were advertised in the Globe.

In those days, there were eight daily newspapers in Boston; the Globe was often the most timid as well as the least partisan. Lyons' story, and the owner's support when the heat rose in its aftermath, was an example of conscience and integrity.

My 1965 Nieman classmates and I were pleased that those honored by the Lyons award were reporters in Vietnam who had displayed physical courage under fire in the field and moral courage facing critics back home. Three individual journalists were singled out for praise—Cornelius (Neil) Sheehan of United Press International, Malcolm Browne of The Associated Press, and

David Halberstam of *The New York Times*—though in a special citation their colleagues also were honored for their “courage, determination and skill [that] helped to let the people know.”

Soon it became our turn to select a Lyons award recipient. Given that four decades of time have passed since we made that decision, I’ve asked some of my classmates about how we approached doing it. Nobody remembers much discussion until quite late in our Nieman year; I don’t recall Dwight Sargent, our curator, mentioning it as a somber duty awaiting us as our year commenced, nor do I believe the preceding class left us a road map about how they’d made their selection.

Then on April 27th, just about the time we were getting ready to return to our papers, Edward R. Murrow died. Lionized in the obituaries, Murrow’s life and death was in the news for many days. Obviously qualified, we chose him to win the award posthumously. Two classmates recall a third member of our class frowning on the choice as a cop-out, contending that Murrow was

late in taking on Senator Joe McCarthy and powerful enough to survive even though he did. But we had no other nominations. If any official voting was done, my guess is that it occurred after dark in a nearby pub.

Ray Jenkins wrote to Ed Murrow’s widow, Janet, and received a heartfelt letter of thanks. In subsequent years, the name of Edward R. Murrow has been cited as personifying the Lyons award as much or more than any other recipient. It was a good choice, though our process for making it was not so good.

By the next year, the class solicited nominations for the award from former Niemans and honored Wilson F. Minor of *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune* for “sharply perceptive investigative reporting of political and racial affairs [that] has consistently blown open the doors of a closed society. His subjects have ranged from Ku Klux Klan’s infiltration of the State Highway Patrol to the inequities of educational funding in Mississippi.”

After three years, the Louis M. Lyons Award seemed off to a strong begin-

ning, even though there were still no guidelines and no assistance to help Nieman Fellows choose a winner. Then, for 13 years, from 1967 until 1980, the award disappeared. Louis died in 1982, having watched this small tribute to his life wither away.

Selecting the best person to honor in a given year is hard work. Jim Thomson helped restore the award, and Bill Kovach made it a high priority for the fellows by beginning work on the award selection early in their Nieman year. They, along with Howard Simons and Bob Giles, deserve credit for keeping the spirit of the Lyons award alive. More than ever, rewarding conscience and integrity in the practice of our craft seems warranted. ■

*Jim Doyle, a 1965 Nieman Fellow, was a reporter at The Boston Globe, the Washington Evening Star, and Newsweek. He served as a special assistant to Watergate Prosecutors Archibald Cox and Leon Jaworski in 1973 and 1974.*

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## Iraqi Journalist Atwar Bahjat Receives 2006 Louis M. Lyons Award

On February 22, 2006 Iraqi TV journalist Atwar Bahjat was kidnapped and killed while covering the bombing of a Shiite shrine Askariya, also known as the Golden Mosque, in her hometown of Samarra. Also killed in the attack were Bahjat’s Iraqi cameraman and engineer. Bahjat, 30, was a war correspondent for *Al Arabiya*, a Dubai-based satellite giant and the most popular news channel in Iraq.

To many Iraqis, Bahjat was a heroine. She went from delivering propaganda through heavily censored state television to reporting on the U.S. occupation for *Al Jazeera* satellite channel. She stayed with *Al Jazeera* for months after the Iraqi government outlawed the news service. This winter, she moved to *Al Arabiya*. She used her pulpit to give a balanced picture of the fighting

and to emphasize human losses.

Her late father was Sunni; her mother, who survives her, is Shiite. Bahjat supported a united Iraq, a sentiment she expressed in her last report: “Whether you are Sunni or Shia, Arab or Kurd, there is no difference between Iraqis, united in fear for this nation.” As a symbol of her support for a united country, she wore a golden pendant in the shape of Iraq around her neck. Bahjat was a poet, a journalist, and a feminist. She had written one book on her adventures as a war correspondent and was working on another on the role of women in Iraq.

At least three other *Al Arabiya* journalists and five of its support workers have been killed since the beginning of the conflict. At least 73 journalists and 26 media support workers have

been killed in Iraq since March 2003, making it the deadliest conflict for the media in recent history, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The killings continue two trends in Iraq: The vast majority of victims have been Iraqi citizens, and most cases have been targeted assassinations rather than crossfire. CPJ research shows that Iraqis constitute nearly 80 percent of journalists and support staffers killed for their work in Iraq. Overall, 60 percent of journalist deaths were murders.

The 2006 Nieman class said they gave the award to Bahjat because “She represents the many Iraqi journalists who have given their lives since the conflict began in March 2003 and those who continue to face grave danger as they report the news in Iraq.” ■



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